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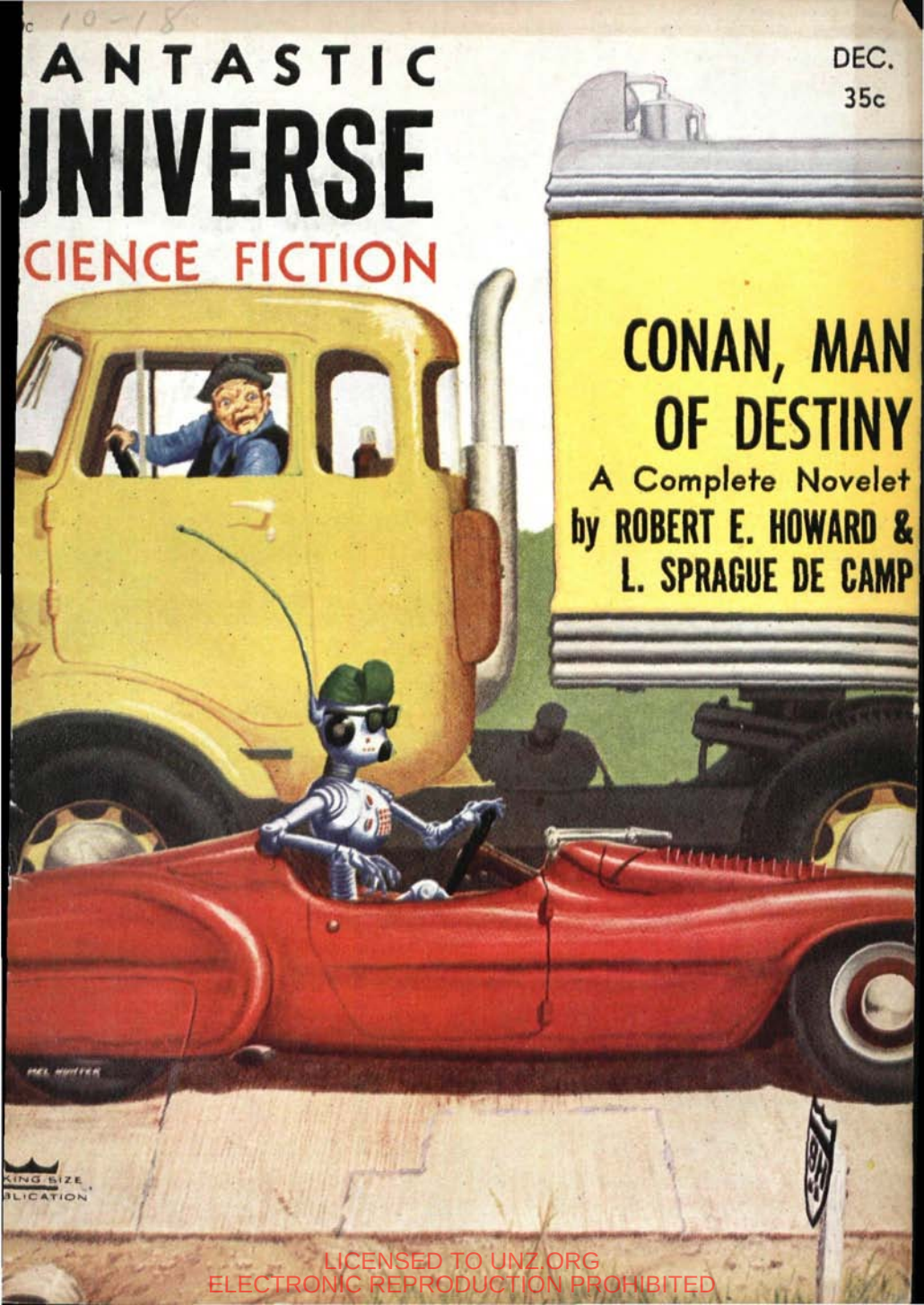
CONAN, MAN OF DESTINY

A Complete Novelet

by ROBERT E. HOWARD & L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP



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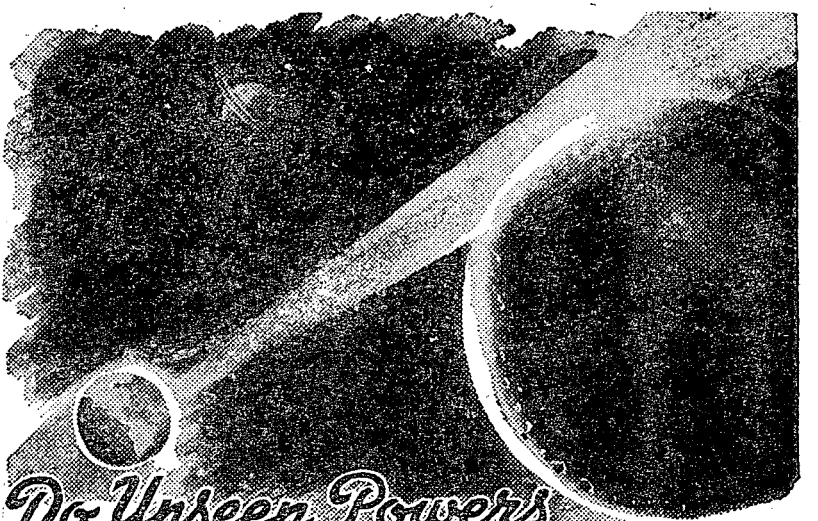

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

A VERY placid truck driver is Joseph Lucius McGinnis, even for the year 1994. It goes without saying that he has seen a good many scientific marvels in his time. But why should a man with a balanced historical perspective become unduly excited about such things? Space flight? "Look, chum, maybe you can tell me what's so special about one little rocket takin' off for Mars? It ain't as if there was a Deborah LaSpurner inside. Even then it would be kid stuff when you consider what we did with the at-omic bomb. I got two kids myself and I'll admit I had to hold on to 'em when they started jumping up and down.

"But me, I never cracked a yawn. I figure that if there really is life on Mars we'll get acquainted with it the hard way and maybe wish we hadn't. But you can be dead certain it's not going to change anything that runs on wheels. I'm mindin' my own business, see? It's no skin off my nose one way or the other. Just so long as we don't have to pay fifty cents for a beer one of these days they can send a hundred rockets to Mars, and I'll come home to the li'le wife with no complaints worth shaking a finger at."

On this particular morning McGinnis is humming a song. It's a very old song, and McGinnis learned it at his grandmother's knee. "Did you ever see a dream walking?" hums McGinnis, marveling at something deep within himself that keeps insisting that so long as he keeps his foot firmly planted on the propulsion pedal of his annoyingly streamlined truck he'll be good for another thirty years of happy suburban living.

Yes, sir. Just let anything modern or mechanical try to remove from the life of a McGinnis a single crackling log in a midwinter fireplace or one chattering blue jay from the tree on his carefully mowed front lawn when autumn sets up a migratory swarming—

A sudden droning jerks McGinnis about in his seat before he can let his thoughts really soar. He stares and—does a swift take. The lines of the old song tumble over themselves, strike a snag and become a roaring Niagara. "It isn't a dream walking. *It's a robot driving!*"

McGinnis takes his foot off the pedal and the robot driver does a swift take too. It's a woman android, you see, and there's something about the big, handsome McGinnis—

You've known all along, haven't you? McGinnis doesn't let the truck overturn. He just manages to be a little late for dinner for the first time in twenty years.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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conan, man of destiny

by . . . Robert E. Howard and L. Sprague de Camp

It has been said in Turan that a woman's wiles may cause even the Sun to tremble and grow pale. But Conan wore a brighter shield.

THE SHIP that had suffered ignominious defeat in the sea-fight wallowed in the crimson wash. Just out of bow-shot the winner limped away towards the rugged hills that overhung the blue water. It was a scene common enough on the Sea of Vilayet in the reign of King Yildiz of Turan.

The ship heeling drunkenly in the blue waste was a high-beaked Turanian war-galley, a sister to the other. On the loser death had reaped a plentiful harvest. Dead men sprawled on the high poop; they hung loosely over the scarred rail; they slumped along the runway that bridged the waist, where the slain oarsmen lay among their broken benches.

Clustered on the poop stood the survivors, thirty men, many grievously wounded. They were men of many nations: Kothians, Zamorians, Brythunians, Corinthians, Shemites, Zaporoskans. Their features were those of wild men, and many bore the scars of lash or branding-iron. Many were half-naked, but the motley clothes they wore were often of good quality,

A warrior in fantasy's bright domain who would dare to match wits or cross swords with Conan the Cimmerian would be reckless indeed. But to join quills in collaborative wayfaring with Conan's creator, the late, great Robert E. Howard in his own chosen field calls for even greater hardihood—and perhaps louder music and stronger wine. But L. Sprague de Camp has dared to do just that, in this second saga of a rousing new Conan series which we like to think has set a new high in imaginative splendor under the blazing suns of Sharpur and Turan.

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though now stained with tar and blood.

Some were bareheaded while others wore steel caps, fur caps, or strips of cloth wound turban-wise about their heads. Some wore shirts of chain-mail; others were naked to their sash-girt waists, their muscular arms and shoulders burnt almost black. Jewels glittered in earrings and the hilts of daggers. Naked swords were in their hands. Their dark eyes were restless.

They stood about a man bigger than any of them, almost a giant, with thickly-corded muscles. A square-cut mane of black hair surmounted his broad low forehead, and the eyes that blazed in his dark, scarred face were a volcanic blue.

These eyes now stared at the shore. No town or harbor was visible along this stretch of lonely coast between Khawarism, the southernmost outpost of the Turanian kingdom, and its capital of Aghrapur. From the waterline rose tree-covered hills, climbing swiftly to the snowy peaks of the Anshans in the distance, on which the sinking sun shone red.

The big man glared at the slowly receding galley. Its crew had been glad to break away from the death-grapple, and it crawled toward a creek that wound out of the hills between high cliffs. On the poop the pirate captain could still make out a tall figure on whose helmet the low sun sparkled. He remembered the features under that helmet, glimpsed in the frenzy of battle—hawk-nosed, black-bearded, with slanting dark eyes. That was Artaban of Shahpur, until recently the scourge of the Sea of Vilayet.

A lean Corinthian spoke: "We almost had the devil. What shall we do now, Conan?"

The gigantic Cimmerian went to one of the steering-sweeps. "Ivanos," he said to the one who had spoken, "you and Hermio take the other sweep. Medius, pick three besides yourself and start bailing. The rest of you dog-souls tie up your cuts and then go down into the waist and bend your backs on the oars. Throw as many stiffs overboard as you need to make room."

"Are you going to follow the other galley to the mouth of the creek?" asked Ivanos.

The Cimmerian shook his head. "We're too waterlogged from the holing their ram gave us to risk another grapple," he said. "But if we pull hard, we can beach her on that headland."

Laboriously they worked the galley inshore. The sun had set, and a haze like soft blue smoke hovered over the dusky water. Their late antagonist vanished into the creek. The starboard rail was almost awash when the bottom of the pirates' galley grounded on the sand and gravel of the headland. Shouts of relief and exaltation resounded from the decks of the slanting vessel, and echoed through the bleak canyons beyond.

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II

THE AKRIM RIVER, which wound through patches of meadow and farmland, was tinged red, and the mountains that rose on either side of the valley looked down on a scene only less ancient than they. Horror had come upon the peaceful valley-dwellers, in the shape of wolfish riders from the outlands. They did not turn their gaze toward the castle that hung on the sheer slope of the mountains, for there too, oppressors lurked.

The clan of Kurush Khan, a sub-chief of one of the more barbarous Hyrkanian tribes from east of the Sea of Vilayet, had been driven westward out of its native steppes by a tribal feud. Now it was taking toll of the Yuetshi villages in the valley of Akrim. Though this was mainly a simple raid for cattle, slaves, and plunder, Kurush Khan had wider ambitions. Kingdoms had been carved out of these hills before.

However, just now, like his warriors, Kurush Khan was drunk with slaughter. The huts of the Yuetshi lay in smoking ruins. The barns had been spared because they contained fodder, as well as the ricks.

Up and down the valley the lean riders raced, stabbing and loosing their barbed arrows. Men howled as the steel drove home and women screamed as they were jerked naked across the raiders' saddlebows.

Horsemen in sheepskins and high fur caps swarmed in the streets of the largest village—a squalid cluster of huts, half mud, half stone. Routed out of their pitiful hiding places the villagers knelt, vainly imploring mercy, or as vainly fled, to be savagely ridden down as they ran. The yataghans whistled, ending their barbaric hilarity in the *zhukk* of cloven flesh and bone.

A fugitive turned with a wild cry as Kurush Khan swooped down on him with his cloak spreading out in the wind like the wings of a hawk. In that instant the eyes of the Yuetshi saw, as in a dream, the bearded face with its thin down-curving nose, the wide sleeve falling away from the lead arm that rose grasping a curving glitter of steel.

The Yuetshi carried one of the few effective weapons in the valley: a heavy hunting-bow with a single arrow. With a screech of desperation he nocked the arrow, drew, and loosed it, just as the Hyrkanian struck at him in passing. The arrow thudded home and Kurush Khan tumbled out of the saddle, instantly dead from a cloven heart.

As the riderless horse raced away, one of the two figures drew itself up on one elbow. It was the Yuetshi, whose life was welling fast from a ghastly cut across neck and shoulder. Gasping, he looked at the other form.

Kurush Khan's beard jutted upwards as if in comic surprise. The

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Yuetshi's arm gave way and his face fell into the dirt, the calamity filling his mouth with dust. He tried to rise, gave a ghastly laugh from frothy lips, and fell back. When the Hyrkanians reached the spot he, too, was dead.

The Hyrkanians squatted like vultures about a slain sheep and conversed over the body of their khan. When they rose, death had been decreed for every Yuetshi in the valley of Akrim.

Granaries, ricks, and stables, spared by Kurush Khan, went up in flames. All prisoners were slain, some tossed living into the flames, and others pierced by swords and flung into the ensanguined streets. Beside the khan's corpse grew a mound of gruesome trophies.

Riders galloped up, swinging the slain across their saddles, to toss them on the grim pyramid. Every place that might hide a shuddering villager was ripped apart or put to the torch.

One tribesman, prodding into a stack of hay, discerned a movement in the straw. With a triumphant yell he pounced upon the stack and dragged his victim to light. It was a girl, and no dumpy, sloe-eyed Yuetshi woman either. Half-tearing off her cloak, the Hyrkanian feasted his eyes on her great beauty.

The girl struggled desperately, but he dragged her remorselessly toward his horse. Then, quick and deadly as a cobra, she snatched a dagger from his girdle and stabbed him twice. With a groan he crumpled, and she sprang like a she-leopard to his horse.

The steed neighed and reared, and she wrenched it about and raced up the valley. Behind her the pack gave tongue and streamed out in pursuit. Arrows whistled about her head.

She guided the horse straight at the mountain-wall on the south of the valley, where a narrow canyon opened out. Here the going was perilous, and the Hyrkanians reined to a less headlong pace among the stones and boulders.

But the girl rode like a wind-blown leaf, and was leading them by several hundred paces when she came to a low wall or barrier across the mouth of the canyon, as if at some time somebody had rolled boulders together to make a crude defense. Tamarisks grew out of the ridge, and a small stream cut through a narrow notch in the center. Men were there.

She saw them among the rocks, and they shouted to her to halt. At first she thought them more Hyrkanians, and then saw otherwise. They were tall and strongly built, with chain-mail glinting under their cloaks, and spired steel caps on their heads. She made up her mind instantly. Throwing herself from her horse she ran up to the rocks and dropped to her knees.

"Aid, in the name of Ishtar the merciful!" she pleaded.

A man emerged, at the sight of whom she cried out: "General Ar-

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taban!" She clasped his knees. "Save me from the wolves that follow!"

"Why should I risk my life for you?" he asked indifferently.

"I knew you at the court of the king at Aghrapur! I danced before you. I am Roxana, the Zamoran."

"Many women have danced before me."

"Then I will give you a password," she said in desperation. "Listen!"

As she whispered a name in his ear, he started as if stung. He stared piercingly at her. Then, clambering upon a great boulder, he faced the oncoming riders with lifted hand.

"Go your way in peace, in the name of King Yildiz of Turan!"

His answer was a whistle of arrows about his ears. He sprang down and waved. Bows twanged all along the barrier and arrows sheeted out among the Hyrkanians. Men rolled from their saddles; horses screamed and bucked. The other riders fell back, yelling in dismay. They wheeled and raced back down the valley.

Artaban turned to Roxana: a tall man in a cloak of crimson silk and a chain-mail corselet threaded with gold. Water and blood had stained his apparel, yet its richness was still notable. His men gathered about him, forty stalwart Turanian mariners bristling with weapons. A miserable-looking Yuetshi stood by with his hands bound.

"My daughter," said Artaban, "I have made enemies in this remote land on your behalf because of a name whispered in my ear. I believed you—"

"If I lied, may a strong man's tortures be mine."

"You will get your wish," he promised gently. "I will see to it personally. You named Prince Teyaspa. What do you know of him?"

"For three years I have shared his exile."

"Where is he?"

She pointed down the valley to where the turrets of the castle were just visible among the crags. "He is there—in the stronghold of Gleg the Zaporoskan."

"That fortress would be hard to take," mused Artaban.

"Send for the rest of your sea-hawks! I know a way to bring you to the heart of the keep!"

He shook his head. "These you see are all my band." Seeing her incredulity he added: "I am not surprised that you wonder. I will tell you . . ."

III

WITH THE frankness that his fellow-Turanians found so disconcerting, Artaban sketched his fall. He did not tell her of his triumphs, which were too well-known to need repetition. He was famous as a general for his swift raids into far countries — Brythunia, Zamora, Koth, and Shem—when five years before, the pirates of the Sea of

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Vilayet, working in league with the outlaw *kozaki* of the adjoining steppes, had become a formidable menace to that westernmost Hyrkanian kingdom, and King Yildiz had called upon Artaban to redress the situation. By vigorous action Artaban had put down the pirates, or at least driven them away from the western shores of the sea.

But Artaban, a passionate gambler, had become embroiled in his own recklessness to the detriment of his purse. To discharge his debts he had, while on a lone patrol with his flagship, seized a legitimate merchantman out of Khorusun, put all her people to the sword, and taken her cargo back to his base to sell secretly. But, though his crew had been sworn to secrecy, somebody blabbed.

Artaban had kept his head only at the price of a command from King Yildiz that almost amounted to suicide: to sail across the Sea of Vilayet to the mouth of the Zaporoska River and destroy the encampments of the pirates. Only two ships happened to be available for this enterprise.

Artaban had found the fortified camp of the Vilayet pirates and had taken it by storm, because only a few of the pirates had been in it at the time. The rest had gone up the river to fight a band of wandering Hyrkanians, similar to Kurush Khan's band, that had attacked the native Zaporoskans along the river, with whom the pirates were on friendly terms. Artaban had destroyed several pirate ships in their docks and captured a number of old or sick pirates.

To cow the absent pirates, Artaban had ordered that those taken alive should be burned by slow fires in the middle of the encampment. This sentence was in the midst of being executed when the main body of the pirates had returned.

Artaban had fled, leaving one of his ships in their hands. Knowing the penalty for failure, he had struck out for the wild stretch along the southwestern shore of Vilayet Sea where the Anshan Mountains came down to the water.

He was soon pursued by the pirates in the captured ship, and overtaken when the western shore was already in sight. The resulting battle had raged over the decks of both ships until the dead and wounded lay everywhere. The greater numbers and superior equipment of the Turanians, together with Artaban's adroit use of his ram, had barely given them a defensive, indecisive victory.

"So we ran the galley ashore in the creek. We might have repaired it, but the king's fleet rules all of Vilayet Sea, and he will have a bowstring ready for me when he knows I've failed. We struck into the mountains, seeking we know not what—a way out of Turanian dominions or a new kingdom to rule."

Roxana listened and then without comment began her tale. As

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Artaban well knew, it was the custom of the kings of Turan, upon coming to the throne, to kill their brothers and their brothers' children in order to eliminate the chance of a civil war. Moreover it was the custom, when the king died, for the nobles and generals to acclaim as king the first of his sons to reach the capital after the event.

Even with this advantage the weak Yildiz could not have conquered his aggressive brother Teyaspa had it not been for his mother, a Kothian woman named Khushia. This formidable old dame, the real ruler of Turan, preferred Yildiz because he was more docile, and Teyaspa was driven into exile in disgrace.

He sought refuge in Iranistan, but discovered that the king of that land was corresponding with Yildiz in regard to poisoning him. In an attempt to reach Vendhya he was captured by a nomadic Hyrkanian tribe who recognized him and sold him to the Turanians. Teyaspa thought his fate was sealed, but his mother intervened and stopped Yildiz from having his brother strangled.

Instead, Teyaspa was confined in the castle of Gleg the Zaporoskan, a fierce semi-bandit chief who had come into the valley of the Akrim many years before and set himself up as a feudal lord over the primitive Yuetshi, preying on them but not protecting them. Teyaspa was furnished with all luxuries and forms of dissipation calculated to soften his fiber.

Roxana explained that she was one of the dancing-girls sent to entertain him. She had fallen violently in love with the handsome prince and, instead of seeking to ruin him, had striven to lift him back to manhood.

"But," she concluded, "Prince Teyaspa has sunk into apathy. One would not know him for the young eagle who led his horsemen against the Brythunian knights and the Shemitic *asshuri*. Imprisonment and wine have blunted the keenness of his mind. He sits entranced on his cushions, coming to life only when I sing or dance for him. But he has the blood of conquerors in him. He is like a lion who sleeps.

"When the Hyrkanians rode into the valley, I slipped out of the castle and went looking for Kurush Khan, hoping to find a man bold enough to aid Teyaspa. But I saw Kurush Khan slain, and then the Hyrkanians became like mad dogs. I hid from them, but they dragged me out.

"My lord, help us! What if you have only a handful of soldiers. Kingdoms have been won by less! When it is known that the prince is free, men will flock to us! Yildiz is a fumbling mediocrity, and the people fear his son Yezdigerd, a fierce, cruel, and gloomy youth.

"The nearest Turanian garrison is three days' ride from here. Akrim is isolated. Only wandering nomads and the wretched Yuetshi

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know its strength. Here an empire can be plotted without interference. You, like myself, are an outlaw. If we band together we can free Teyaspa and place him on his throne! If he were king, unbelievable wealth and honor would be yours, while Yildiz offers you nothing but a bowstring!"

She was on her knees, gripping his cloak, her dark eyes ablaze with passion. Artaban stared down at her silently. Then, suddenly, he laughed a gusty laugh.

"We shall need the Hyrkanians," he said, and the girl clapped her hands with a cry of joy.

IV

"HOLD UP!" Conan the Cimmerian halted and glanced about, craning his massive neck. Behind him his comrades shifted with a clank of weapons. They were in a narrow canyon, flanked on either hand by steep slopes, grown with stunted firs. Before them a small spring welled up among straggling trees and trickled away down a moss-green channel.

"Water here at least," grunted Conan. "Drink."

The previous evening, a quick march had brought them to Artaban's ship in its hiding-place in the creek before dark. Conan had left four of his most seriously wounded men here, to work at patching up the vessel, while he pushed on with the rest. Believing that the Turanians were only a short distance ahead, he had pressed recklessly ahead in hope of coming up with them and avenging the massacre on the Zaporoska.

But then, with the setting of the young moon, they had lost the trail in a maze of gullies and wandered blindly. Now at dawn they had found water, but were lost and worn out. The only sign of human life they had seen since leaving the coast was a huddle of huts among the crags, housing nondescript skin-clad creatures who fled howling at their approach. Somewhere in the hills a lion roared.

Of the twenty-six men, only Conan's iron muscles retained their resilience. "Get some sleep," he growled. "Ivanos, pick two men to take the first watch with you. When the sun's over that fir, wake three others. I'm going to scout up this gorge."

He strode up the canyon and was soon lost among the straggling growth. The slopes changed to towering cliffs that rose sheer from the sloping, rock-littered floor. Then with heart-stopping suddenness a wild shaggy figure sprang up from a tangle of bushes and confronted the pirate. Conan's face darkened belligerently as his sword flashed. Then he checked the stroke, seeing that the apparition was weaponless.

It was a Yuetshi—a wizened, gnomelike man in sheepskins, with long arms, short legs, and a flat yellow slant-eyed face seamed with many small wrinkles.

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"Khosatral!" exclaimed the vagabond. "What brings a member of the free brotherhood to this Hyrkanian-haunted land?" The man spoke the Turanian dialect of Hyrkanian, but with a strong accent.

"Who are you?" grunted Conan.

"I was a chief of the Yuetshi," answered the other with a wild laugh. "I was called Vinashko. But you haven't answered me."

"What lies beyond this canyon?" Conan countered.

"Over the ridge directly in front of you lies a tangle of gullies and crags. If you thread your way carefully among them, you will come out overlooking the broad valley of the Akrim. Until yesterday it was the home of my tribe, but today it holds only their charred bones."

"Is there food there?" Conan asked.

"Yes—and death. A horde of Hyrkanian nomads holds the valley."

As Conan ruminated this, a step brought him about, to see Ivanos approaching.

"Hah!" Conan scowled. "I told you to watch while the men slept!"

"They are too hungry to sleep," retorted the Corinthian, suspiciously eyeing the Yuetshi.

"Crom!" growled the Cimmerian. "I cannot produce food out of thin air. They must continue to gnaw their thumbs until we find a village to loot—"

"I can lead you to enough food to feed an army," interrupted Vinashko.

Conan said, his voice heavy with menace: "Don't mock me, my friend! You just said the Hyrkanians—"

"There's a place near here, unknown to them, where we stored food. I was on my way there when I saw you."

Conan hefted his sword, a broad, straight, double-edged blade over four feet long, in a land where curved blades were more the rule. "Then let's go, Yuetshi. I accept your offer—and gratefully. But at the first false move, off goes your head! I do not speak in jest."

Again the Yuetshi laughed that wild, scornful laugh, and motioned them to follow. He made for the nearer cliff, groped among the brittle bushes, and disclosed a crack in the wall. Beckoning, he bent and crawled inside.

"Into that wolf's den?" said Ivanos.

"What are you afraid of?" said Conan. "Mice?"

He bent and squeezed through the opening, and the other followed him. Conan found himself, not in a cave, but in a narrow cleft of the cliff. Overhead a narrow, crooked ribbon of blue morning sky appeared between the steep walls, which got higher with every step.

They advanced through the gloom for a hundred paces and came out into a wide circular space surrounded by the towering walls of what looked at first glance like

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a monstrous honeycomb. A low roaring came from the center of the space, where a small circular curbing surrounded a hole in the floor from which issued a pallid flame as tall as a man, casting a wan illumination about the cavity.

Conan looked curiously about him. It was like being at the bottom of a gigantic well. The floor was of solid rock, worn smooth as if by the feet of ten thousand generations. The walls, too regularly circular to be altogether natural, were pierced by hundreds of black square depressions, a hand's breath deep and arranged in regular rows and tiers.

The wall rose stupendously, ending in a small circle of blue sky, where a vulture hung like a dot. A spiral stairway cut in the black rock started up from ground-level, made half a complete circle as it rose, and ended with a platform in front of a larger black hole in the wall, the entrance to a tunnel.

Vinashko explained: "Those holes are the tombs of an ancient people who lived here even before my ancestors came to the Sea of Vilayet. There are a few dim legends about these people. It is said that they were not human, but preyed upon my ancestors until a priest of the Yuetshi by a great spell confined them to their holes in the wall and lit that fire to hold them there. No doubt their bones have long ago crumbled to dust.

"A few of my people have tried to chip away the slabs of stone that block these tombs, but the rock defied their efforts." He pointed to heaps of stuff at one side of the amphitheater. "My people stored food here against times of famine. Take your fill. There are no more Yuetshi to eat it."

Conan repressed a shudder of superstitious fear. "Your people should have dwelt in these caves. One man could hold that outer cleft against a horde."

The Yuetshi shrugged. "Here there is no water. Besides, when the Hyrkanians swooped down there was no time. My people were not warlike. They only wished to till the soil."

Conan shook his head, unable to understand such natures. Vinashko was pulling out leather bags of grain, rice, moldy cheese, and dried meat, and skins of sour wine.

"Go bring some of the men to help carry the stuff, Ivanos," said Conan, staring upward. "I'll stay here."

As Ivanos swaggered off, Vinashko tugged at Conan's arm. "Now do you believe I'm honest?"

"Aye, by Crom," answered Conan, gnawing a handful of dried figs. "Any man that leads me to food must be a friend. But how did you and your tribe get here from the Valley of the Akrim? It must be a long steep road."

Vinashko's eyes gleamed like those of a hungry wolf. "That is our secret. I will show you, if you trust me."

"When my belly's full," said

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Conan with his mouth almost bursting with figs. "We're following that black devil Artaban of Shahpur, who is somewhere in these mountains."

"He is your enemy?"

"Enemy! If I catch him I'll make a pair of boots of his hide."

"Artaban of Shahpur is only three hours' ride from here."

"Ha!" Conan started up, feeling for his sword, his blue eyes ablaze. "Lead me to him!"

"Take care!" cried Vinashko. "He has forty armored Turanians, and has been joined by Dayuki and a hundred and fifty Hyrkanians. How many warriors have you, lord?"

Conan munched silently, scowling. With such a disparity of numbers he could not afford to give Artaban any advantages. In the months since he had become a pirate captain he had beaten and bullied his crew into an effective force, but it was still an instrument that had to be used with care. By themselves they were reckless and improvident. Well led, they could do much. But without wise leadership they would throw away their lives on a whim.

Vinashko said: "If you will come with me, *kozak*, I will show you what no man except a Yuetshi has seen for a thousand years!"

"What's that?" Conan queried, instantly alert.

"A road of death for our enemies!"

Conan took a step, then halted. "Wait. Here come the red brothers. Hear the dogs swear!"

"Send them back with the food," whispered Vinashko as half a dozen pirates swaggered out of the cleft to gape at the cavern. Conan faced them with a gesture.

"Lug this stuff back to the spring," he said. "I told you I should find food."

"And what of you?" demanded Ivanos.

"Don't worry about me. I have words with Vinashko. Go back to camp and gorge yourselves—and may you live to regret it."

As the pirates' footsteps faded away down the cleft, Conan gave Vinashko a clap on the back that staggered him. "Let's go," he said.

The Yuetshi led the way up the circular stairway carved in the rock wall. Above the last tier of tombs it ended at the tunnel's mouth. Conan found that he could stand upright in the tunnel.

"If you follow this tunnel," said Vinashko, "you will come out behind the castle of the Zaporoskan, Gleg, that overlooks Akrim."

"What good will that do?" grunted Conan, feeling his way behind the Yuetshi.

"Yesterday when the slaying began, I stood my ground for a while against the Hyrkanian dogs. But when my comrades had all been cut down I fled the valley, running up to the Gorge of Diva. I had no sooner entered the gorge when I found myself among strange warriors, who knocked me down and

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bound me, wishing to ask me what went on in the valley. They were sailors of the king's Vilayet squadron, and called their leader Artaban.

"While they questioned me, a girl came riding like mad with the Hyrkanians after her. When she sprang from her horse and begged aid of Artaban I recognized her as the Zamoran dancing-girl who lives in Gleg's castle. A volley of arrows scattered the Hyrkanians, and then Artaban talked with the girl, completely forgetting about me.

"For three years Gleg has held a captive. I know, because I have taken grain and sheep to the castle, to be paid in the Zaporoskan fashion, with curses and blows. *Kozak,* the prisoner is Teyaspa, brother of King Yildiz!"

Conan grunted in surprise.

"The girl, Roxana, disclosed this to Artaban, and he swore to aid her in freeing the prince. As they talked, the Hyrkanians returned and halted at a distance, vengeful but cautious. Artaban hailed them and had speech with Dayuki, the new chief since Kurush Khan was slain. At last the Hyrkanian came over the wall of rocks and shared bread and salt with Artaban. And the three plotted to rescue Prince Teyaspa and put him on the throne.

"Roxana had discovered the secret way to the castle. Today, just before sunset, the Hyrkanians are to attack the fortress from the front. While they thus attract the attention of the Zaporoskans, Artaban and his men are to gain entrance by the secret passageway. Roxana will open the door for them, and they will take the prince and flee into the hills to recruit warriors. As they talked, night fell, and I gnawed through my cords and slipped away.

"You wish vengeance. I'll show you how to trap Artaban. Slay the lot—all but Teyaspa. You can either extort a mighty price from Khushia for her son, or from Yildiz for killing him, or if you prefer you can try to be king-maker yourself."

"Show me," said Conan, eyes agleam with eagerness.

V

THE SMOOTH floor of the tunnel, in which three horses might have been ridden abreast, slanted downward. From time to time short flights of steps gave on to lower levels. For a while Conan could not see anything in the darkness. Then a faint glow ahead relieved it. The glow became a silvery sheen, and the sound of falling water filled the tunnel.

They stood in the mouth of the tunnel, which was masked by a sheet of water rushing over the cliff above. From the pool that foamed at the foot of the falls, a narrow stream raced away down the gorge.

Vinashko pointed out a ledge that ran from the cavern-mouth, skirting the pool. Conan followed

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him. Plunging through the thin edge of the falls, he found himself in a gorge that was like a knife-cut through the hills. Nowhere was it more than fifty paces wide, with sheer cliffs on both sides. No vegetation grew anywhere except for a fringe along the stream. The stream meandered down the canyon floor to plunge through a narrow crack in the opposite cliff.

Conan followed Vinashko up the twisting gorge. Within three hundred paces they lost sight of the waterfall. The floor slanted upward. Shortly the Yuetshi drew back, clutching his companion's arm. A stunted tree grew at an angle in the rock wall, and behind this Vinashko crouched, pointing.

Beyond the angle, the gorge ran on for eighty paces and ended in an impasse. On their left the cliff seemed curiously altered, and Conan stared for an instant before he realized that he was looking at a man-made wall. They were almost behind a castle built in a notch in the cliffs.

Its wall rose sheer from the edge of a deep crevice. No bridge spanned this chasm, and the only apparent entrance in the wall was a heavy iron-braced door halfway up its precipitous expanse. Opposite to it a narrow ledge ran along the opposite side of the gorge, and this had been improved so that it could be reached on foot from where they stood.

"By this path the girl Roxana escaped," said Vinashko. "This gorge runs almost parallel to the Akrim. It narrows to the west and finally comes into the valley through a narrow notch, where the stream flows through. The Zaporoskans have blocked the entrance with stones so that the path cannot be seen from the outer valley unless one knows of it. They seldom use this road and know nothing of the tunnel behind the waterfall."

Conan rubbed his shaven chin. He yearned to loot the castle himself but saw no way to come to it. "By Crom, Vinashko, I should like to look on this noted valley."

The Yuetshi glanced at Conan's bulk and shook his head. "There is a way we call the Eagle's Road, but it is not for such as you."

"Ymir! Is a skin-clad savage a better climber than a Cimmerian hillman? Get going, my friend."

Vinashko shrugged and led the way back down the gorge until, within sight of the waterfall, he stopped at what looked like a shallow groove corroded in the higher cliff-wall. Looking closely Conan saw a series of shallow hand-holds notched into the solid rock.

"I'd have deepened these pockmarks," grumbled Conan, but started up nevertheless after Vinashko, clinging to the shallow pits by toes and fingers. At last they reached the top of the ridge forming the southern side of the gorge and sat down with their feet hanging over the edge.

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The gorge twisted like a snake's track beneath them. Conan looked out over the opposite and lower wall into the valley of the Akrim.

On his right the morning sun stood high over the glittering Sea of Vilayet and on his left rose the white-hooded peaks of the Anshans. Behind him he could see down into the tangle of gorges among which he knew his crew to be encamped.

Smoke still floated lazily up from the blackened patches that had been villages. Down the valley, on the left bank of the river, were pitched a number of tents of hide.

Conan saw men swarming like ants around these tents. These were the Hyrkanians, Vinashko informed him, and pointed up the valley to the mouth of a narrow canyon where the Turanians were encamped. But the castle drew Conan's interest.

It was solidly set in a notch in the cliffs between the gorge beneath them and the valley beyond. The castle faced the valley, entirely surrounded by a massive twenty-foot wall. A ponderous gate flanked by towers pierced with slits for arrows commanded the outer slope. This slope was not too steep to be climbed or even ridden up, but afforded no cover.

"It would take a devil to storm that castle," growled Conan. "How are we to come at the king's brother in that pile of rock? You'd better lead us to Artaban, so I can take his head back to the Zaporoska."

"Be less foolhardy if you wish to wear your own," answered Vinashko. "What do you see in the gorge?"

"A lot of bare stone with a fringe of green along the stream."

The Yuetshi grinned wolf-like. "And do you notice that the fringe is denser on the right bank, where it is also higher? Listen! From behind the waterfall we can watch until the Turanians come up the gorge. Then, while they are busy at Gleg's castle, we'll hide among the bushes along the stream and waylay them as they return. We'll kill all but Teyaspa, whom we will take captive. Then we'll go back through the tunnel. Have you a ship to escape in?"

"Aye," said Conan, rising and stretching. "Vinashko, is there any way down from this knife-edge you have us balanced on except that shaft we came up by?"

"There is a trail that leads east along the ridge and then down into those gullies where your men camp. Let me show you. Do you see that rock that looks like an old woman? Well, you turn right there . . ."

Conan listened attentively to the directions, but the substance of them was that this perilous path, more suitable for ibex or chamois than for men, did not provide access to the gorge beneath them.

In the midst of his explanation,

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Vinashko turned and stiffened. "What's this?" he said.

Men were galloping out of the distant Hyrkanian camp and lashing their horses across the shallow river. The sun struck glints from their lance-points, and the castle walls helmets began to sparkle.

"The attack!" cried Vinashko. "Khosatral Khel! They've changed their plans. They were not going to attack until evening! This is serious! We must get down there before the Turanians arrive!"

They levered their bodies into the shallow groove and crept down, step by step.

At last they stood in the gorge and hastened toward the waterfall. They reached the pool, crossed the ledge, and plunged through the fall. As they came into the dimness beyond, Vinashko gripped Conan's mailed arm.

Above the rush of water the Cimmerian heard the clink of steel on rock. He looked out through the silver-shimmering screen that made everything ghostly and unreal, but which hid them from the eyes of anyone outside. They had not gained their refuge any too soon.

A band of men was coming along the gorge—tall men in mail hauberks and turban-bound helmets. At their head strode one taller than the rest, with black-bearded hawk-like features. Conan sighed and gripped his sword hilt, moving forward a trifle, but Vinashko caught him.

"In the gods' names, *kozak*," he whispered frantically, "don't throw away our lives! We have them trapped, but if you rush out now—"

"Don't worry, little man," said Conan with a somber grin. "I am not so simple as to spoil a good vengeance by a thoughtless impulse."

The Turanians were crossing the narrow stream. On the farther bank they halted in an attitude of listening. Presently, above the rush of the waters, the men in the cave-mouth heard the distant shouting of many men.

"The attack!" whispered Vinashko.

As if it were a signal, the Turanians started swiftly up the gorge. Vinashko touched the Cimmerian's arm.

"Stay here and watch. I'll hurry back and bring your pirates."

"Hurry, then," said Conan. "It will be touch and go if you can get them here in time."

And Vinashko slipped away like a shadow.

VI

IN A BROAD chamber shielded from the too-inquisitive by gold-worked tapestries, and silken screens, the prince Teyaspa reclined at full length on a narrow divan. He seemed the picture of voluptuous idleness as he lounged in silks and satins, a crystal jar of wine at his elbow. His dark eyes were those

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of a dreamer whose dreams are tinted with wine and drugs. His gaze rested on Roxana, who tensely gripped the bars of a casement, peering out. But his expression was placid and far-away and he seemed unaware of the yells and clamor that raged without.

Roxana moved restlessly, glancing at the prince over her slim shoulder. She had fought like a tigress to keep Teyaspa from falling into the gulf of degeneracy and resignation that his captors had prepared for him. Roxana, no fatalist, had kept him stung into life and ambition.

"It is time," she breathed, turning swiftly. "The sun is almost at the zenith. The Hyrkanians are riding up the slope, lashing their steeds and shooting arrows against the walls. The Zaporoskans are pouring poison darts and stones down upon them. Their bodies litter the slope, but they keep coming on again like madmen. I must leave you now. You will sit on the golden throne, my lover, if you have the courage to stand firm."

She prostrated herself and kissed his slippers in an ecstasy of adoration. Then she rose and hurried out of the room, and through another where ten great black mutes kept guard night and day. She traversed a corridor to the outer court that lay between the castle and the postern wall. Though Teyaspa was not allowed unguarded out of his chamber, she was free to come and go as she liked.

Crossing the court, she approached the door that led into the gorge. One warrior leaned there, disgruntled because he could not take part in the fighting. Though the rear of the castle seemed invulnerable, the cautious Gleg had posted a sentry there anyway. The man on guard was a Sogdian, his felt cap perched on the side of his head.

He leaned on a pike, scowling, as Roxana approached him. "What do you here, woman?" he demanded.

"I am afraid," Roxana replied instantly. "The cries and shouts frighten me, lord. The prince is dazed with wine, and there is no one to soothe my fears."

She would have fired the heart of a corpse as she stood before the Sogdian in an attitude of fear and supplication. He plucked his thick beard.

"Do not fear, little gazelle," he said. "*I'll* soothe you." He laid a black-nailed hand on her shoulder and drew her close. "Those ruffians won't touch a lock of your hair. I—ahhh!"

Snuggling in his arms, Roxana had slipped a dagger from her sash and thrust it through his thick throat. One of the Sogdian's hands clutched at his beard while the other fumbled for the hilts in his girdle. He reeled and fell heavily.

Roxana snatched a bunch of keys from his girdle and ran to the door. She swung it open and gave a low cry of joy at the sight of Artaban

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and his Turanians on the ledge across the chasm.

A heavy plank, used as a bridge, lay inside the gate, but it was far too heavy for her to handle. Chance had enabled her to use it for her previous escape, when rare carelessness had left it in place across the chasm and unguarded for a few minutes.

Artaban tossed her the end of a rope, which she made fast to the hinges of the door. The other end was gripped by half a dozen strong men, and three Turanians crossed the crevice, swinging hand over hand. They spanned the chasm with the plank for the rest to cross.

"Twenty men guard the bridge," snapped Artaban. "The rest follow me."

The sea-wolves drew their steel and followed their chief. Artaban led them swiftly after the light-footed girl. As they entered the castle, a servitor sprang up and gaped at them. Before he could cry out, Dayuki's razor-edged yataghan sliced through his throat, and the band rushed into the chamber where the ten mutes sprang up, gripping scimitars.

There was a flurry of fierce, silent fighting, noiseless except for the hiss and rasp of steel and the gasps of the wounded. Three Turanians died, and the rest strode into the inner chamber over the slumped bodies of the blacks.

Teyaspa rose, his quiet eyes gleaming with old fire, as Artaban dramatically knelt before him and lifted the hilt of his scimitar.

"These are the warriors who will fight until death takes them to set you on your throne!" cried Roxana.

"We must go quickly, before the Zaporoskán dogs are aware of us," said Artaban.

He drew up his men in a clump around Teyaspa. Swiftly they traversed the chambers, crossed the court, and approached the gate. But the clang of steel had been heard. Even as the raiders were crossing the bridge, savage yells rose from behind them. Across the courtyard rushed a stocky, powerful figure in silk and steel, followed by fifty helmeted archers and swordsmen.

"Gleg!" screamed Roxana.

"Cast down the plank!" roared Artaban, springing to the bridgehead.

On each side of the chasm bows twanged until the air over the plank was clouded with shafts whistling in both directions. Several Zaporoskans fell, but so did the two Turanians who stooped to lift the plank. Across the bridge rushed Gleg, his cold gray eyes blazing under his spired helmet.

Artaban met him breast to breast. In a glittering whirl of steel the Turanian's scimitar grated around Gleg's blade, and the keen edge cut through the camail and the thick muscles of the Zaporoskan's neck. Gleg staggered and, with a wild cry, pitched off into the chasm.

In an instant the Turanians had

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cast the bridge after him. On the far side the Zaporoskans halted with furious yells and began shooting their thick horn bows as fast as they could draw and nock. Before the Turanians, running down the ledge, could get out of range, three more had been brought down and a couple of others had received minor wounds from the vicious arrow-storm.

Artaban cursed at his losses. "All but six of you go forward to make sure that the way is clear," he ordered. "I will follow with the prince. My lord, I could not bring a horse up this defile, but I will have the dogs make you a litter of spears."

"The gods would turn from me if I rode on my deliverers' shoulders!" said Teyaspa. "Again I am a man! I will never forget this day!"

"The gods be praised!" whispered Roxana. "You have chosen the path of honor."

They came within sight of the waterfall. All but the small group in the rear had crossed the stream and were straggling down the left bank when there came a multiple snap of bowstrings, as though a hand had swept across the strings of a muted harp.

A sheet of arrows hissed across the stream into their ranks, and then another and another. The foremost Turanians went down like wheat under the scythe and the rest gave ground, shouting alarm.

"Dog!" shouted Artaban, turning on Dayuki. "This is your work!"

"Do I order my men to shoot at me?" squalled the Hyrkanian, his dark face pale. "This is some new enemy!"

Artaban ran down the gorge toward his demoralized men, cursing. He knew that the Zaporoskans would rig up some sort of bridge across the chasm and pursue him, catching him between two forces. Who his assailants were he had no idea. From the castle he heard the shouts of battle, and then a great rumble of hooves and shouting and a clang of steel seemed to come from the outer valley. But, pent as he was in that narrow gorge which muffled sound, he could not be sure.

The Turanians continued to fall before the storm of arrows from their invisible opponents. Some staggered blindly into the bushes. Artaban knocked their bows aside, shouting: "Fools! Why waste arrows on shadows? Draw your steel and follow me!"

With the fury of men ignominiously forced into retreat, the remaining Turanians charged the ambush, their dark eyes blazing. Arrows brought down some, but the rest leaped into the water and splashed across. From the bushes on the farther bank rose wild figures, mail-clad or half-naked, swords in hands.

"Up and at them!" bellowed the great voice of Conan. "Cut and thrust!"

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VII

A YELL OF amazement rose from the Turanians at the sight of the Vilayet pirates. Then they closed with a roar. The rasp and clangor of steel echoed from the cliffs. The first Turanians to spring up the higher bank fell back into the stream with heads split. Then the pirates leaped down the bank to meet their foes hand-to-hand, thigh-deep in water that soon grew dark with their spilled blood. Pirate and Turanian slashed and slew in a blind frenzy, neither giving nor expecting quarter.

Dayuki ran into the mêlée, glaring. His double-curved blade split a pirate's head. Then Vinashko leaped upon him barehanded and cursing.

The Hyrkanian recoiled from the mad ferocity in the Yuetshi's features, but Vinashko caught Dayuki around the neck and sank his teeth in the man's throat. He hung on, biting deeper and deeper, heedless of the dagger that Dayuki drove into his side. He continued to struggle until both men lost their footing and fell into the stream. Still locked in furious combat they were washed down with the current, now one face showing above water, now another, until both vanished forever.

The Turanians were driven back up the left bank, where they made a brief last-ditch stand. Then they broke and fled toward the place where Prince Teyaspa stared entranced in the shadow of the cliff, with the small knot of warriors whom Artaban had detailed to guard him. Twice he moved as though to draw his sword and cast himself into the fray, but Roxana, clinging to his knees, stopped him.

Artaban, breaking away from the battle, hastened to Teyaspa. The admiral's sword was still unsheathed, his mail was hacked, and blood dripped from beneath his helmet. After him through the mêlée came Conan, brandishing his great sword in his sledge-like fist. He beat down his foes with strokes that shattered bucklers, caved in helmets, and clove through mail, flesh, and bone.

"Ho, you rascals!" he roared in his barbarous Hyrkanian. "I want your head, Artaban, and the fellow beside you there—Teyaspa. Have no fear, my pretty prince. I'll not hurt you."

Artaban, looking about for an avenue of escape, saw the groove leading up the cliff and guessed its purpose.

"Quick, my lord!" he whispered. "Up the cliff! I'll hold off the barbarian while you climb!"

"Yes, hurry!" urged Roxana. "I'll follow!"

But the fatalistic mask had descended again on Prince Teyaspa. He shrugged. "It is plain that the gods do not will that I should press the throne. What man can escape his destiny?"

Roxana clutched her hair with a look of horror. Artaban sheathed his sword, sprang for the groove,

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and started up with the agility of a sailor. But Conan, coming up behind him at a run, reached up, caught his ankle, and plucked him out of his cranny like a fowler catching a bird by the leg.

Artaban struck the ground with a clang. As he tried to roll over to wrench loose, the Cimmerian drove his sword into the Turanian's body, crunching through mail-links, and into the ground beneath.

Pirates approached with drawn blades. Teyaspa spread his hands, saying: "Take me if you will. I am Teyaspa."

Roxana swayed, her hands over her eyes. Then like a flash she thrust her dagger through Teyaspa's heart, and he died on his feet. As he fell, she drove the point into her own breast and sank down beside her lover. Moaning, she cradled his head in her arms, while the pirates stood about, awed and uncomprehending.

A sound up the gorge made them lift their heads. They had dwindled to a handful, weary and dazed with battle, their garments half torn from their bodies.

Conan said: "Men are coming down the gorge. Get back into the tunnel."

They obeyed, but slowly, as if they only half understood him. Before the last of them had ducked under the waterfall, a stream of men poured down the path from the castle.

Conan, cursing and beating his rearmost men to make them hurry, looked around to see the gorge thronged with armed figures. He recognized the fur caps of the Zaporoskans and with them the white turbans of the Imperial Guards from Aghrapur. One of these wore a spray of bird-of-paradise feathers in his turban, and Conan was startled to recognize, from these and other indications, the general of the Imperial Guards, the third man of the Turanian Empire.

The general saw Conan and the tail of his procession too and shouted an order. As Conan, the last in line, plunged through the waterfall, a body of Turanians detached themselves from the rest and ran to the pool.

Conan yelled to his men to run, then turned and faced the sheet of water from the inner side, holding up a buckler from a dead Turanian and his great sword.

Presently a guardsman came through the sheet of water. He started to yell, but the sound was cut off by a meaty *chunk* as Conan's sword sheared through his neck. His head and body tumbled separately off the ledge into the pool. The second guard had time to strike at the dim figure that towered over him, but his sword rebounded from the Cimmerian's buckler. The next instant he in turn fell back into the pool with a cloven skull.

There were shouts, partly muffled by the sound of the water. Conan flattened himself against the

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side of the tunnel, and a storm of arrows whipped through the sheet of water, bringing little splashes of droplets with them and rebounding with a clatter from the walls and floor of the tunnel.

A glance back showed Conan that his men had vanished into the gloom beyond. He ran after them, so that when a few moments later the guardsmen again burst through the waterfall they found nobody in front of them.

Meanwhile in the gorge, voices filled with horror rose as the newcomers halted among the corpses. The general knelt beside the dead prince and the dying girl.

"It is Prince Teyaspa!" he cried.

"He is beyond help now," murmured Roxana. "I would have made him king, but you robbed him of his manhood—so I killed him."

"But I bring him the crown of Turan!" cried the general. "Yildiz is dead, and the people will rise against his son Yezdigerd if they have anyone else to follow—"

"Too late!" whispered Roxana, and her dark head sank on her arm.

VIII

CONAN ran up the tunnel with the feet of the pursuing Turanians echoing after him. Where the tunnel opened into the great natural chimney lined with the tombs of the forgotten race, he saw his men grouped uncertainly on the floor of the pit below him, some looking at the hissing flame and some up at the stair down which they had come.

"Go on to the ship!" he bellowed through cupped hands. The words rattled back from the black cylindrical walls.

The men ran out into the cleft that led to the outer world. Conan turned again and leaned against the side of the chimney just alongside the tunnel entrance. He waited as the footsteps grew louder.

An Imperial Guard popped out of the tunnel. Again Conan's sword swished and struck, biting into the man's back through mail and skin and spine. In complete silence the guard pitched head-first off the platform. His momentum carried him out from the spiral stair toward the middle of the floor below. His body plunged into the hole in the rocky floor from which issued the flame and wedged there like a cork in a bottle. The flame went out with a pop, plunging the chamber into gloom only faintly relieved by the opening to the sky far above.

Conan did not see the body strike the floor, for he was watching the tunnel-opening for his next foe. The next guard looked out, but leaped back as Conan struck at him with a ferocious backhand. There came a jabber of voices, and an arrow whizzed out of the tunnel past Conan's face, to strike the far side of the chamber and shatter against the black rock.

Conan turned and started down

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the stone steps, taking three at a time. As he reached the bottom he saw Ivanos herding the last of the pirates into the cleft across the floor, perhaps ten strides away. To the left of the cleft, five times Conan's height from the floor, the Turanian guards emerged from the tunnel and clattered down the stairs. A couple loosed arrows at the Cimmerian as they ran, but between the speed of his motion and the dimness of the light their shots missed.

But, as Conan reached the bottom steps, another group of beings appeared. With a grinding sound the slabs of stone blocking the ends of the tomb-cavities swung inward, first a few, then by scores. Like a swarm of larvae issuing from their cells, the inhabitants of the tombs came forth. Conan had not taken three strides toward the cleft when he found the way blocked by a dozen of the things.

They were of vaguely human form, but white and hairless, lean and stringy as if from a long fast. Their toes and fingers ended in great hooked claws. They had large staring eyes set in faces that looked more like those of bats than of human beings, with great flaring ears, little snub-noses, and wide mouths that opened to show needle-pointed fangs.

The first to reach the floor were those who crawled out of the bottom tiers of cells. But the upper tiers were opening too and the creatures were spilling out of them by hundreds, climbing swiftly down the pitted walls of the chamber by their hooked claws. Those that reached the floor first glimpsed the last pirates as they entered the cleft. With a pointing of clawed fingers and a shrill twittering, the creatures nearest the cleft rushed toward and into it.

Conan, the hairs of his neck prickling with a barbarian's horror of supernatural menaces, recognized the newcomers as the dreaded brylukas of Zaporoskan legend—creatures neither man nor beast nor demon, but a little of all three. Their near-human intelligence served their bestial destructiveness, while their supernatural powers enabled them to survive even though entombed for centuries. Creatures of darkness, they had been held at bay by the light of the flame. When this was put out they emerged, as ferocious as ever and even more eager for prey.

Those that struck the floor near Conan rushed upon him, claws outstretched. With an inarticulate roar he whirled, making wide sweeps with his great sword to keep them from piling on his back. The blade sheared off a head here, an arm there, and cut one bryluka in half.

Still they clustered, twittering, while from the spiral staircase rose the shrieks of the leading Turanians as brylukas leaped upon them from above and climbed up from below to fasten their claws and fangs in their bodies.

The stair was clustered with

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writhing, battling figures as the Turanians hacked madly at the things crowding upon them. A cluster consisting of one guard with several brylukas clinging to him rolled off the stair to strike the floor. The entrance to the cleft was solidly jammed with twittering brylukas trying to force their way in to chase Conan's pirates.

In the seconds before they overwhelmed him too, Conan saw that neither way out would serve him. With a resounding oath he ran across the floor, but not in the direction the brylukas expected. Weaving and zigzagging, his sword a whirling glimmer in the gloom, he reached the wall directly below the platform that formed the top of the stair and the entrance to the tunnel, leaving a trail of writhing figures behind him. Hooked claws snatched at him as he ran, glancing off his mail, tearing his clothes to ribbons, and drawing blood from deep scratches on his arms and legs.

As he reached the wall, Conan dropped his buckler, took his sword in his teeth, sprang high into the air, and caught the lower sill of one of the cells in the third tier above the floor, a cell that had already discharged its occupant. With incredible agility the Cimmerian mountaineer went up the wall, using the cell-openings as handholds and foot-holds.

Once, as his face came opposite a cell-opening, a hideous batlike visage looked into his as the brylukа started to emerge. Conan's fist shot out and struck the grinning face with a crunch of bones. Then without waiting to see what execution he had done he swarmed on up.

Below him, other brylukas climbed the wall in pursuit. Then with a heave and a grunt he was on the platform. The few guards who had been tardy in starting down the stairs, had turned on seeing what was happening in the chamber and had raced back through the tunnel. A few brylukas crowded into the tunnel on their heels just as Conan reached the platform.

Even as they turned toward him he was among them like a whirlwind. Bodies, whole or dismembered, spilled off the platform as his sword sheared through white unnatural flesh. For an instant a cleared area stretched before him. Conan plunged into the tunnel and ran with all his might.

Ahead of him ran a few of the vampire creatures, and ahead of them the guards who had been coming along the tunnel. Conan, coming up to the brylukas from behind, struck down one, then another, then another, until they were all writhing in agony behind him. He kept on until he came to the end of the tunnel, where the last of the guards had just ducked through the waterfall.

A glance back showed Conan another swarm of brylukas rushing upon him with outstretched claws.

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Conan bolted through the sheet of water in his turn and found himself looking down upon the scene of the recent battle with the Turanians.

The general and the rest of his escort were standing about, shouting and gesticulating as their fellows emerged from the water and ran down the ledge to the ground. When Conan appeared right after the last of these, the yammer continued without a break until a louder shout from the general cut through it:

"It is one of the pirates! Shoot!"

Conan, running down the ledge, was already halfway to the ladder-shaft. Those in front of him, who had just reached the floor of the gorge, turned to stare as he raced past them with such tremendous strides that the archers, misjudging his speed, sent a flight of arrows clattering against the rocks behind him. Before they had nocked their second arrows he had reached the vertical groove in the cliff-face.

The Cimmerian slipped into this shaft, whose concavity protected him momentarily from the arrows of the Turanians standing near the general. He caught at the indentations with hands and toes and went up like a monkey. By the time the Turanians had recovered enough presence of mind to run up the gorge to where they could see him to shoot at, Conan was fifteen paces up and rising fast.

Another storm of arrows whistled about him, clattering as they glanced from the rock. A couple struck his body but were prevented from piercing his flesh by his mail-shirt. Three more struck his clothing and caught in the cloth. One hit his right arm, the point passing shallowly under the skin and then out again.

With a fearful oath Conan tore the arrow out of the wound point-first, threw it from him, and continued his climb. Blood from the flesh-wound drenched his arm and trickled down his body. By the next volley he was so high that the arrows had little force left when they reached him. One struck his boot but failed to penetrate.

Up and up he went, the Turanians becoming small beneath him. When their arrows no longer reached him they ceased shooting. Snatches of argument floated up. The general wanted his men to climb the shaft after Conan, and the men protested that this would be futile, as he would simply wait at the top of the cliff and cut their heads off one by one as they emerged. Conan smiled grimly.

Then he reached the top. He sat gasping on the edge with his feet hanging down into the shaft while he bandaged his wounds with strips torn from his clothing, meantime looking about him. Glancing ahead over the rock wall into the valley of the Akrim he saw sheepskin-clad Hyrkanians riding hard for the hills, pursued by horsemen

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in glittering mail—Turanian soldiers.

Below him the Turanians and Zaporoskans milled around like ants and finally set off up the gorge to the castle, leaving a few of their number on watch in case Conan should come back down the groove.

Some time later Conan rose, stretched his great muscles, and turned to look eastward towards the sea of Vilayet. He started as his keen vision picked up a ship, and shading his eyes with his hand he made out a galley of the Turanian navy crawling away from the mouth of the creek where Artaban had left his ship.

"Crom!" he muttered. "So the cowards piled aboard and pulled out without waiting!"

He struck his palm with his fist, growling deep in his throat like an angry bear. Then he relaxed and laughed shortly. It was no more than he should have expected. Anyway, he was getting tired of the Hyrkanian lands, and there were still many countries in the west that he had never visited.

He started to hunt for the precarious route down from the ridge that Vinashko had shown him.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's Startling Issue will be

WILLIAM TENN, *with* "Wednesday's Child"
LESTER DEL REY, *with* "The Keepers of the House"
PHILIP K. DICK, *with* "The Minority Report"
ROBERT BLOCH, *with* "You Got to Have Brains"
WILLIAM MORRISON *and*
FREDERIK POHL, *with* "The Head Hunters"

and many others

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the entity

by . . . Arthur Porges

There are more things in the outermost regions of space than are dreamed of in man's mundane philosophy. Just for example —

THE EMISSARY from a distant planet was addressing the World Council in closed session.

It was a super-secret conference. Only the assembled senior statesmen knew of the visitor's presence on earth; and at the moment it was all they did know, except that he bore a message of immense significance for humanity. It was a strange experience for the members, since the emissary's essential nature was incomprehensible to their minds.

One instant the Council saw a glinting, cloudy mass the size of a man, and the next—a tiny pillar of bluish haze. There were times when they heard strains of atonal music and felt pulsating colors. And always they had an odd, not unpleasant visceral awareness.

But they felt little strain, for the visitor's motives, still to be explained, were obviously benevolent. From the moment he had taken over their public address system, speaking in a baritone voice of bright, unearthly beauty, the terrestrials knew him intuitively for a friend.

When the brief excitement at-

Arthur Porges may or may not have hunted birds of swift passage in Amazonian wilds or winged in its flight the fabled firebird of the Aztecs, with its pinions of a thousand hues resplendent. But we think you'll agree that he is a cosmic hunter extraordinary. It is just possible that the horror in minuscule he has bagged here is not the most terrifying entity in all of Time and Space but we're convinced that as long as human life endures it will be so regarded.

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tendant upon this first contact with another planet had subsided, the emissary began his message. After a few preliminary remarks to create the necessary empathy, he said, with humorous apology in his tones: "Now I will tell you a little story. It leads to a decision you must make soon. And I offer my services to implement that decision, if necessary.

"I hope to make the account simple, clarifying as much as possible the problem you face. If you can imagine yourselves trying to explain to a completely alien intelligence—that of a mantis, for example—the physiological effects upon its species of DDT, you will understand something of my task and excuse any obscurities. The basic situation, I believe, will be quite clear."

He didn't stress the enormous mental gap between mantids and man, with its obvious parallel to his own role. But that was only courtesy, they knew, and they accepted the fact without resentment.

"Several million years ago," the emissary continued, "when I was still in the learning stage—" Here he sensed their shock and his voice seemed to smile a little sadly. "It's an incredible age to you, of course, a point not irrelevant to the problem ahead. But more on that later.

"I was at the time curator of a sort of zoo which we maintained on a nearby planet. We had combed the galaxy for specimens, and possessed a great variety of life-forms whose countless divergences were of constant interest to science. There were living crystals, gases that waxed philosophical, electromagnetic intellects, and a host of other beings even more foreign to your experience.

"We were, I confess, rather smug in holding that no really different creatures could possibly exist. After all, we had collected for ages, the last truly novel organism having been captured long before.

"Then we were disillusioned. A scoutship sent in an emergency report that a life-form was passing through our solar system; and purely as a routine gesture, I went out to inspect it. Naturally I expected the thing to be a duplicate, basically, of some specimen already in our custody. To my astonishment, it was altogether new, and of a complexity that surprised me.

"Nor do I mean—and this is not vanity—that the entity was in any way superior to my own class of beings. It is true that we pursued it in vain for many months, unable to cope with the thing; but neither was it capable of harming us. We are equally complex, but fundamentally different.

"None of the ordinary methods enabled us to seize it. Traction rays, force patterns, space warps—nothing seemed able to constrain this creature. It passed easily through all kinds of matter, was immune to our excellent arsenal of traps, and co-existed in a multi-

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tude of dimensions more numerous even than our own.

"In short, it would have escaped almost effortlessly, when luck came to our aid. One of our best scientists, at work in a laboratory outpost some light years away, saw the entity pass, with my fleet of ships in futile attendance. He had just finished some experiments on a device which I shall call the T-ray, a sub-atomic manifold outside of your experience or imagination. Four of his little ships had grouped themselves to generate a tetrahedral pattern with the new ray, and we were amazed to see the specimen hurl itself against that structure without the slightest penetration.

"Naturally, I took prompt advantage of so fortunate a circumstance. The four laboratory ships, under my orders, stopped their generators, and by a superior bit of maneuvering reformed the tetrahedron about the life-form. It was a neatly sprung trap, and a most successful coup. In spite of its utmost efforts, the thing was helpless, and we bore it home in triumph.

"I see you are confused, unable to relate this rather verbose account to earthly affairs. Please be patient. It is vitally necessary to prepare your minds for an important revelation.

"Now, as curator, I called upon our most capable scientists to make a thorough study of the alien being, which they did, taking well over a thousand years of your time. There was much we found out, and more that remained baffling. We were unable, for example, to determine its method of absorbing or utilizing energy; and some phases of its physical structure seemed mutually contradictory. Nor were we able to communicate with it by any means whatsoever.

"Although we searched thousands of stars and planets for other specimens, we found none of its fellows; and yet we had reason to believe ours was only an immature individual of the species. The implication was inescapable that the entity came from some part of space too distant even for our ships to explore. We now believe that it originated at the farthest edge of the universe.

"Millions of years passed, but there remained a large residuum of knowledge we were unable to master. Certain aspects of our captive were as puzzling then as in the first weeks of its capture. I might point out that we never retain specimens which genuinely wish to be free; but in those days we erred occasionally in assuming that an organism's mere inability to communicate in our terms meant satisfaction with life in the zoo. The offer I mean to make shortly is a violation of that humane code, but justifiably so.

"To return, however, our study of the strange creature came to an abrupt end. Because of a careless technician, the force pattern was

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momentarily disrupted, and moving with tremendous velocity, the prisoner escaped. Of course, we pursued it; but our T-ray ships were no longer conveniently grouped, and before we could get organized, the entity was many light years away, hopelessly beyond tracing. Its speed, now that it had apparently matured, even in captivity, far exceeded that of our best scouts.

"But we did not abandon the chase. While not of the first priority, the recapture of that specimen was one object of every exploratory expedition. As we ranged farther into space in our systematic mapping of the galaxy, we found many remarkable beings, but nothing so different as our former prisoner.

"And then, not many centuries ago, our scouts reached this solar system of yours. Long before seeing the planet's disc, they know from instruments that the entity was here. This was its chosen home. Immediately word was flashed back, and we sent scientists to survey the situation.

"There was, to begin with, the question of whether or not to leave the thing in its picked environment for most effective study. It is often more fruitful to examine a life-form in its own setting. And that, generally speaking, is still the problem: to leave it here or take it back with us. As you will see, the matter is of profound concern to humanity.

"But do not be alarmed. The decision will be yours entirely. I am only trying to supply the needed background for your debate on the question.

"It was possible for us to reconstruct much of the thing's history after its escape from our zoo. There were long periods, we believe, when it paused motionless in the void. And there were times when it traveled at enormous velocity, pervasive yet unified, tenuous but concentrated. It might have ended its journeying at any one of countless planets, but chance or the working of subtle instinct brought it finally to a medium-sized star with nine new-born worlds.

"One of these—your earth—seemed suitable, and in its fashion the entity settled on and through the steaming globe, racked with earthquakes, scoured by abraisive tides, and seared by chemical vapors. It lapped itself about the tortured planet to wait with the patience of a billion years' perspective.

"And the inevitable happened. A cloudy speck of heavy, unstable molecules, a near virus, stirred to life under the fierce actinic rays of the youthful sun, ending the entity's long vigil. It must have eaten soon after, appreciatively, but with circumspection. With food its hunger grew, and as the ages passed, each living thing knew this alien and paid it toll, early or late."

Here the emissary paused, and they were aware of his pity.

"Remember that the entity was and is utterly imperceptible to the

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crude senses of its victims, although a gifted few among the higher animals vaguely felt at times its sinister imminence.

"So it was natural that when man arose to become earth's only naming creature, he called this being after the sole evidence of its presence, never dreaming it was native neither to the world nor man, but sprung uniquely from some galaxy on the rim of the universe.

"It is here now—today—inside and outside the earth, permeating every molecule with hyperdimensional tendrils. I can see in this room that one of you—no, I didn't mean that." He stopped, and there was a tense silence.

"Of all living things," he resumed hastily, "only the most primitive, recalling racially what had awaited those first colloidal blobs in the warm sea, learned to resist, even in part, the entity's pressing demands. Over these—the protozoa—it has but limited power.

"We—my people—could still tear the entity's fibres from the earth; but in millions of years its presence here has had a profound effect upon life. Evolution—what a tortured mechanism that has become on this planet! The terrible swell of 'natural' increase—a wholly abnormal development, really—is just one example. Nowhere else are things like that. Your problem is indeed one of bewildering magnitude.

"I know that most of you are beginning to understand the nature of this dilemma and its implications for mankind. If I remove the entity, now that your world is conditioned to geometric increase, the result could be catastrophic indeed: a gigantic compost of organisms in one writhing mass. The living devouring the living, so that the fragments, still alive, become somehow part of the devourer.

"The decision must be yours and yours alone.

"Say, then, men of the Council, will you live forever, knowing the consequences of such a choice?

"Shall we free you from this alien elemental—this entity you call Death?"

THE HEAD HUNTERS

By William Morrison & Frederik Pohl

When science fiction strives for a documentary-type realism in the field of space mechanics and atomic-age theory it may, if successful, profoundly stir the imagination, and reach heights of maturity seldom encountered in any other branch of imaginative literature. The short-stories of F. B. Bryning are of this nature, and so is the remarkable THE HEAD HUNTERS *by* William Morrison *and* Frederik Pohl *in our very next issue. You won't want to miss this breathlessly exciting yarn of isotope-plant, asteroid-zone engineering and space hazards incalculable by two writers with a real thrilling story to tell.*

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the conquerors

by . . . Ed M. Clinton, Jr.

Bowing the knee to alien victors was a bitter pill for Earthmen to swallow. But a knee can bend and still be fashioned of steel!

HADLEY clutched the jutting metal arm of the free fall ladder, and said to the enemy officer, "I'm afraid I'm ill."

A faint flutter of amusement crossed Iyaka's parchment-on-bone face. "Well—space comes hard to some," he said. His manner was not so unkind as it was consciously superior, which aggravated Hadley's embarrassment all the more. He tapped the Earthman on the shoulder. "Come with me, Coordinator."

Hadley followed him, swinging from one handhold to the next along the ladder, to the washroom in the rear of the gig. It took him an agonized moment to figure out the place, though. In spite of physiological similarities, cultural variation had made for exasperating differences in the way Iyaka's people designed their facilities.

Feeling better, he swung forward again and peered out of the gig's ports. They were approaching the big Segavas star ship, and it arced into view as he looked. For a moment, also, he saw the shadowed disc of Earth as they swung about. The thought came to him that

If you were thrilled by the medical miracles of tomorrow in Ed M. Clinton's recent unusual lead novelette, EPIDEMIC ON VENUS—*and your letters leave little doubt on that score—a new and slightly different kind of thrill awaits you here. For you'll see tomorrow unroll before you in as startling a tale of alien mentality effrontery as you'll be likely to encounter this side of Betelgeuse.*

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nowadays that lovely sight was an all too uncommon experience. He regretted that the view was so fleeting. The opportunity might be a long time coming again.

There were two others in the gig, Iyaka's staff officers, Hadley assumed. One of them was at the controls, and the other was presently polishing his brassard with a colored kerchief. Like Iyaka, they radiated confidence, power, authority. *Hail the conquering heroes,* Hadley thought. He would be glad when this damned business was over!

Their uniforms were of a shocking red, cut to an alien pattern, and they wore them with a candor no Earthman could have mustered. He was sure that the Segavan eye was less sensitive, though probably more discriminating, in the red area of the spectrum, for to a human eye, with its ready response to red, the effect was painfully dazzling.

With a clang the gig shuddered into contact with the star ship. Iyaka, who alone among his people spoke Terran, smoothed his uniform and said stiffly: "We will be going aboard in a moment. I must warn you in advance that the personage to whom you are being taken is more than merely the captain of this vessel. He is the incarnation of our great people, and he speaks with absolute authority on all matters."

"Under the circumstances," growled Hadley, a trifle annoyed, "why need I worry about this? Since I represent a conquered race, all I can do is listen and obey."

He could almost see the huge chest expand and was convinced that had Iyaka's uniform possessed buttons they surely would have popped. "Naturally," the enemy officer said. "But I wanted you to understand the extent of the captain's authority."

There was another clang and an ear-piercing scraping. Hadley glanced up in time to see the view of space wiped from the ports by the steel walls of the landing cradle as the gig was hauled aboard. He felt weight returning, and with it a comforting sense of orientation. He wondered if the ship's gravity matched that of the Segavan's home planet, for he felt considerably lighter than when Earthside. Probably he would never know. He didn't consider there would be much opportunity for questioning the Segavas while he was with them—which seemed a shame.

The gig had ceased moving. After a brief interval of waiting the airlock groaned open, and Iyaka led him through the double seal, his aides following closely behind.

The star ship was obviously parent to the gig. It was engineered identically but on a vaster scale and Hadley saw immediately the same significant dependence on raw materials only slightly transformed. Such materials, for instance, as steels and aluminum alloys. There

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was the same frequent use of bolts and hinges, and reliance upon beams for structural stability. There was also an extreme use of bright reds and oranges and to his eyes this resulted in a pronounced indistinctness and loss of detail. What would a Segavan eye look like on the dissecting table? he wondered.

There was an armed troop in the receiving area, which he estimated must consist of nearly sixty men. He considered this a somewhat larger contingent than would normally be required to handle one unarmed Earthman. However, the pomp and ritual obviously must be observed. It seemed to be a special group, too, because its members all glittered with superfluous regalia. Their wide belts were embellished with medals and chevrons—apparently awards of some sort, since they varied from individual to individual.

Iyaka snapped a command to the officer in charge of the troop, in the singsong, glottally-explosive language of his people, and the troop split into a two-columned escort. "This way," Iyaka growled.

Hadley sighed and followed him. "What pompous nonsense," he muttered.

Iyaka twisted his skinny head. "What did you say?"

"It was nothing, nothing," replied Hadley, shaking his head and smiling.

Iyaka eyed him suspiciously for a moment, then turned away and stared stiffly forward. Hadley looked back as they marched away. The gig was being left alone, the lock still open. That at least was comforting. While the whole affair bored him to distraction, he felt a little nervous—although he would never have confessed it to LaGrange.

After all, he was alone, a single Earthman, on the starship of Earth's self-styled conquerors. Presumably this was how Daniel Boone felt at an Indian pow-wow! Only here the pipe of peace was missing.

The corridor broadened at its end, feeding into a group of cable-operated elevators and a wide stairway. It was inevitable that the whole shebang should insist on marching up the stairway with him. He considered asking Iyaka if the elevators were out of commission, but thought better of it.

He had no idea how far amidships the endless stairway ascended, but it was a considerable distance, and when they finally reached the ultimate landing he was utterly winded. He made no effort to conceal the fact, and one of Iyaka's aides grinned and muttered to Iyaka.

The Segavan looked at him, and smiled patronizingly. "Perhaps I should not say this, but you see what a soft culture such as yours does to a man?" He clapped Hadley on the back and dug his seven bony fingers into the Earthman's flesh. "Times will be better. Under

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the Segavas, Terra and its people will grow and strengthen."

Hadley said, "You give me hope, then, that the Segavas will be gracious masters. In our planet's native history, so many primitive conquerors have destroyed simpler civilizations, sacking their treasure, devouring their mineral wealth, crushing their culture—"

It was more than mockery. Hadley was really curious. What had these foolish, confident Segavas in mind for an Earth they had seen surrender after their first ultimatum? There was no time for Iyaka to reply, if he intended to, for they were nearing a door at the far end of the corridor which swung open as they approached. Its ornate decoration reminded Hadley of middle twentieth-century Earth.

It opened on an unbelievably red conference room, huge and spacious—a veritable chamber of fire which left him gasping. Within was a long yellow table, at which a large number of the Segavas were seated and at its head, radiating absolute authority like a fluorescent lamp, sat the Segavas who was obviously the captain of the ship.

This lad, thought Hadley, *is the boss.*

The troop halted at the door, and Iyaka and his staff officers escorted Hadley into that fantastically dazzling room. Hadley squinted and shook his head, the better to focus his nearly blinded eyes. The Segavas at the table stared at him with intense curiosity, their eyes following him in unison as he came closer.

Iyaka saluted, his left fist doubled tightly and pressed to his forehead, and talked for a moment to his captain. The captain nodded, answered curtly, and then aimed his glittering black eyes at Hadley. Iyaka said, "Captain Tillikut greets you, Coordinator Hadley, and asks if you are prepared to receive his instructions."

Hadley licked his lips. He had to call himself back to the business at hand, for he was still a little dazed by the bizarre decor of the room. "Um—tell the captain," he said finally, "that I speak for all of Terra when I welcome his people to our world."

Iyaka translated. A thin, satiric smile—it was all the Segavas seemed able to muster, but it neatly characterized their transparent consciousness of divine destiny—stained Captain Tillikut's tight-skinned face. He chattered to Iyaka for a moment.

Then Iyaka said to Hadley, "Captain Tillikut says that he is glad that your people are ready to accept the benevolent administration of the Segavas, and asks again if you are prepared for your instructions."

Hadley extracted a sheaf of papers from his tunic pocket. "These are my official letters of authority," he said to Iyaka, and handed them over. They wouldn't stand up in a local civil court, he thought bitterly. Ritual!

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Iyaka made a great pretense of examining the documents, though Hadley seriously doubted that he could read Terran. He then gave them to Captain Tillikut, who at least had the dignity not to feign comprehension.

Iyaka and the captain talked.

"The captain says," translated Iyaka, turning to Hadley, "that tomorrow morning, by your local reckoning, you will accompany a group of our representatives back to Terra and commence a preliminary survey of your planet."

Hadley nodded. "May I ask the purpose of this survey?"

Iyaka and the captain consulted together and then Iyaka said:

"Since you and your people are from this moment forward, by authority of the papers you have just given us, under the administration of the Segavas, there can be no harm in your knowing the general plan of our project. This survey will enable us first of all to establish the nature of your scientific establishment, and, on the basis of such knowledge, to provide a schedule for our occupation procedure and our gradual assumption of management of those and all other resources."

Hadley pursed his lips and put his arms behind his back. "I see. You realize, of course, that such a small group could only make a most cursory examination."

"Naturally," Iyaka said. "Your instructions are to provide us with data on the major technical installations, and to conduct our survey group on a tour of these installations. That of course will only be the first step. Its purpose, frankly, is to give us the true *flavor* of your civilization."

"I see. Are there any other instructions at this time?"

There was a brief exchange between Iyaka and Tillikut. "None," said Iyaka. "We will take you now to your quarters."

The captain, smiling again that wan smile of folded parchment, waved a hand and spoke rapidly. Iyaka, too, smiled. "Captain Tillikut asks me to remind you that, if you do your job well, there will be a high place for you in the reorganized Terran society."

Hadley bowed, a gesture that Iyaka seemed to understand. "The captain is most gracious, and the Coordinator wishes to assure him that he is not blind to the advantages of cooperation." He straightened. "Now can I talk to my government?"

Iyaka nodded. "Certainly. It will be necessary for me to monitor the conversation, however. This way, please." He saluted his captain again with the same clenched fist gesture, spun on his heels, and led Hadley from the room, the ever-present aides at his side. Outside the door they picked up the guard troop and tramped methodically down the corridor.

Ten minutes later Hadley was putting through his call. "Hello, LaGrange, this is Hadley."

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"Greetings! How are we doing?"

"About as expected."

"Any idea what their demands will be?"

"Nothing specific. We'll be coming down for a survey tomorrow." Hadley gave the official at the other end of the wire the details, and Iyaka supplied him with the number of Segavans that would be in the party.

"Well, we'll prepare a welcoming committee." LaGrange cleared his throat. "Loaded with the proper respect, of course."

"Certainly. And—LaGrange . . ."

"Yes, Hadley?"

"I'll be glad when this is over. Do you realize I'm missing my son's graduation?"

LaGrange's reply was reproachful. "But think of the importance of what you're doing!"

Hadley stifled a retort. "See you tomorrow," he growled.

Iyaka said as he led the Earthman to his quarters: "I must say I admire your courage. And permit me, as a Segavas, to add that I personally think your culture will easily integrate with ours, and that we may both profit."

It came so obviously from the heart that Hadley had no desire to laugh. "Thank you," he said, and followed him . . .

Greater Omaha Landing Field, doing duty for the first time in generations as a spaceport, was alive with curious people. Hadley stood watching them from the platform—the eternal three close to him and the tight clutch of scientists and military representatives just inside the lock at his back. He imagined that a primitive county fair must have exuded much the same atmosphere. Indeed, he was just a little afraid that the fine edge of curiosity, the side-show aura, might show through to the Segavas.

Hadley could hardly hear Iyaka's voice above the noise of the crowd and the playing of the bands, even though it was close against his ear. "We are most pleased at the reception your admirable people are giving us," Iyaka was saying.

"One must learn to accept the inevitable," replied Hadley, and then he added, "Both as individuals and as entire societies."

"It is the way of destiny," nodded Iyaka in solemn agreement.

A pathway began to open up from the edge of the field to the foot of the Segavas ship, and several large cars swung into it and moved slowly toward them. Iyaka observed them through narrowed eyes. He said nothing, but continued to stare intently as the first one halted at the foot of the platform.

"I believe," said Hadley, turning to Iyaka, "that these are our transportation."

"Yes." Iyaka's face wore an uneasy frown. "The style is very primitive," he decided. "Tell me,

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what is the precise power source?"

Hadley smiled. "I'm not too versed in such matters," he lied, "but I believe it derives from some central transmission station in the middle of the city."

"Oh," responded Iyaka. "I saw no wires."

"If it pleases the committee, we can go anytime."

Iyaka nodded and turned to the survey committee. They talked for a moment, and then Iyaka said to Hadley, "Proceed." They went down the winding ladder, Hadley with the two aides directly behind him, Iyaka following after.

The trailing committee members looked around with frankly curious eyes, reminding Hadley for all the world of a conducted tour composed of inordinately curious individuals disembarking on a foreign planet, which in a way it was.

The group consisted, according to Iyaka, of a physicist, a chemist, a cultural anthropologist, two military attaches, several government bureau representatives, assorted engineers, and, of course the eternal guard, an elite troop of fifty-four. Hadley had finally through sheer desperate curiosity made an exact count. All the committeemen wore uniforms, too, looking like small boys dressed up for a party.

Tourists, Hadley thought again. *I'm a damned tourist guide.*

The cheers and shouting quieted when they reached the ground, and only the music continued. Hadley opened the door of the first car for Iyaka and his aides, and they climbed in, the Earthman following. He knew that there would be a Terran in each of the other cars. He saw doors swinging open and committeemen, with guards from the elite troop, stepping in, all down the long line.

The cushions adjusted to their weights and closed gently around them. Iyaka leaned back, obviously enjoying himself. His staff men, a trifle hesitantly, followed suit.

Iyaka started forward. "Where is our driver?" he asked, apprehensively.

"These are robot controlled," explained Hadley. "As I said, the power source is located in some central power station. I'm sorry that my lack of technical knowledge prevents me from being more specific."

Iyaka seemed to acquire a sudden distaste for contact with the cushions. "Very good," he said uncertainly. "Truly a fine scientific achievement. Is it recent?"

"Well — before my birth," shrugged Hadley.

The car was moving now, and behind it the others followed, a many-segmented snake winding out of the landing field and into one of the main arteries of the city. At first the absence of a driver disquieted Iyaka, but after a while he relaxed.

"We would like first to visit the capitol building, and set up suitable occupation headquarters."

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"Of course," Hadley said, "that's where we're being taken now."

There was a tiny buzz, and Iyaka's hand swooped into his inside pocket and retrieved a small communicator, trailing wires out of the pocket. He spoke into it, harshly, and a voice answered in the Segavan tongue.

Iyaka looked at Hadley. "Dr. Citenik wants the cars stopped for a moment."

Citenik was the physicist. "As you wish." Hadley said, leaning forward and pressing a button just above the armrest.

The car rolled to a stop. Hadley twisted around, and looked with gratification out the back window. Citenik, from the second car, was on his hands and knees, peering under the short snout of his car. Hadley, Iyaka, and the guards got out and joined him. Citenik arose, dusted his uniform, and talked for a moment to Iyaka.

The latter turned to Hadley. "Dr. Citenik wants to know what makes it work, and why it doesn't make any noise."

Hadley shrugged. "I couldn't say. It *is* pretty quiet, though, isn't it? If you wish, I'll get you detailed plans."

Iyaka nodded and conveyed the information to Citenik, who was still staring at the hood. The physicist shot a few words at Iyaka, glaring at Hadley as he did so.

"He wants it opened," Iyaka said to Hadley.

Again Hadley heaved his shoulders. "That can't be done. There's nothing to open. I'm extremely sorry, Commander."

Iyaka conveyed the incredible information to Citenik, who looked at Hadley in disbelief, and then slowly walked around the car, shaking his head. Every once in a while he reached out and jiggled some protuberance, twisting and tugging, apparently determined to make Hadley out a liar.

Later, as they approached the capitol building, Iyaka said, "And after we've set up headquarters, we'll want to see a typical military installation."

Hadley tried to look as embarrassed as he could. "I'm afraid that's impossible," he murmured.

Iyaka drew himself up slightly, an automatic movement, indignation coloring his bony cheeks. "Hadley, we've been doing nicely so far, but apparently you forget that this is an occupied planet. *We intend to see that military establishment.*"

"But you see," Hadley explained, "we haven't any."

Iyaka stared. Then he began to laugh . . .

Hadley stretched out languorously and let the bed fit itself to his body. It felt mighty good. He'd had another long day, the third in a series of long and rather boring days. Though, on consideration, it had possessed its amusing moments. He stared up into the

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darkness, letting his thoughts coalesce before calling LaGrange.

At length he slipped the thick gold ring from his finger and spoke to it. "LaGrange, Central, please."

He yawned while he waited. Iyaka had begun to look a little dark around the eyes, he thought. There was a bit less of the strutting conqueror about him. "I must remind you, Hadley," the Segavan had said early that morning, "that overhead hangs our vessel, and that we are perfectly capable of dealing with any situation which may arise. I *hope*," he had concluded with a slight twitching of his paper-thin eyebrows, "that all of your people are adopting the same realistic attitude as yourself."

The conversation had occurred near the beginning of the day's tour, before Iyaka and his group had inspected General Communications, the complex brain center of communication between Earth and all of the associated worlds. Of course, Iyaka didn't know about the latter yet—

"LaGrange speaking," came the familiar voice from the ring.

"Hadley."

"Good! I'm dying of curiosity."

"I'm dying of boredom. Blast it, LaGrange, I'll get back at you for this."

LaGrange chuckled. "Temper, temper. How did it go today? How are our conquerors taking it? Do they approve of our organization?"

Hadley stifled another yawn. "Well, we went through communications first thing today. I let Iyaka talk to his ship through the all-wave locator. That gave him a thrill! Then Citenik insisted that we inspect Central Power." Hadley laughed. "I still don't think he believes it. He keeps looking for wires, and I had to explain to Iyaka five times—and each time he translated it a little differently—that C P supplies most of the world's power. Citenik convinced Iyaka that it was impossible for all this to emanate from one small building. Then Iyaka warned me."

LaGrange's voice darkened. "Warned you?"

"Yes, he warned me. He said that it would do us no good to hide our secrets, that when their troops landed they would find out everything anyway. Then he offered me a job."

LaGrange's laughter rattled from the ring. "Oh, no! Cooperate, eh?"

"Exactly," Hadley said. "Anyway, their anthropologist Rekilo wanted to poke around in a few museums, which we did, and I gave him a few books and tapes, and a machine to play the tapes on. Iyaka suggested I learn their language, and I said, 'sure.'"

"Have you?"

"I had most of it by this morning. But I'm damned if I'll give them the satisfaction of knowing I spent the time at it. Besides, it's more useful as secret knowledge."

LaGrange clucked a bit. "That threat, though. They *could* hurt somebody."

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"A boatload of Indians invading New York harbor could shoot somebody in the backside with an arrow," Hadley said. "But I'll watch it."

"What's tomorrow?"

"Windup, if I can manage it. I'll take them through atomics, then the transmutation plant, robot center, and the *piece de resistance* as a finisher."

"The star ship?"

"Yes. You said there'd be one Earthside."

"Oh, yes, we made sure of that. The *Hercules*."

Hadley went to sleep immediately after putting the ring back on.

The next day dawned bright and clear.

Hadley pretended to doze as the car which he shared with Iyaka, Citenik, and their two aides moved across the desert. Pretended only—for he was listening intently to Iyaka's conversation with Citenik, a conversation which they thought he could not understand.

Citenik was saying, "I was very much impressed by the atomic plant. It is an achievement at least on a level with ours."

"Come, come!" snapped Iyaka, somewhat irritably, and Hadley flickered his eyes open long enough to catch the color rising in the Segavan's pale cheeks. "Don't take me for a fool, Citenik. I've seen enough atomic installations on Segavas to be aware that there are differences here. I want your *honest* opinion as a physicist."

Citenik chewed his colorless lips, and the skin drew tighter than ever over the bones of his face. Hadley watched through slitted eyes. "Very well. I feel that this station was a considerably more advanced atomic energy plant than any on Segavas."

Again little raspberries blossomed in Iyaka's cheeks. "Thank you. I was sure of that myself."

They rode in silence for a while. At length Iyaka turned and nudged Hadley, and said in Terran, "I am most interested in this robot plant of yours. Is that where they manufacture the operation devices for—" He nodded at the front of the car. "For this?"

Hadley inclined his head. "Among other things, yes."

The rosy hue literally spurted up Iyaka's cheeks, clear to his forehead. "You are entirely too evasive. Remember to whom you are speaking, and answer my questions directly."

Hadley quenched a surge of annoyance. He was suddenly very tired of the whole thing, very glad it would shortly be over. "Sorry," he managed to say, "I thought I had. The answer, of course, is yes."

"You said, 'among other things.' *What* other things?"

Hadley rubbed his face. "Mmm—servomechanisms for home maintenance, for traffic control, for communications substations. Medical assistance devices, computers, linguistic and musical transcribing and transposing devices—" He

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leaned forward and peered ahead. "Ah! We're here!" He fell back, smiling at Iyaka. "I've shown you everything you wished. Now the humble pride of a conquered people will be satisfied if you will honor us by inspecting our greatest achievement."

"It was as you wished," said Iyaka, but he did not sound particularly enthusiastic The car swung off the highway onto a long paved strip, which presently dropped down into an underground tube. Iyaka and Citenik pressed forward, and so did the two aides, parrot-like, their expressions utterly imitative.

"Underground?" murmured Iyaka. "This achievement you speak of is—located underground?"

"It's not necessary to pass through the atmosphere," commented Hadley.

Iyaka frowned.

"Do you know," asked Citenik in his own language, "what he is talking about?"

Iyaka shrugged, his shoulders betraying his annoyance more than his face. "No, but it's something he's been yammering about all day. I thought it best to satisfy him. A sop to their ego, you know."

"I hope you're right," said Citenik, sounding as if he believed otherwise.

The car burst into a vast underground chamber that was bathed in a flood of radiance whose source was so far overhead as to be indistinguishable, and came to a gentle halt. One of the aides opened the door and Iyaka got out, followed by the others.

They stood by the car, blinking painfully for a moment, their eyes dazzled by the light. There was the faint distant hum of activity, voices swallowed by distance, the clank and clatter of moving objects, the rumble of machinery.

"Commander, this place is huge!" gasped Citenik. "Why, I can't even see the—"

"Be quiet," snapped Iyaka. "Not another word."

Hadley pointed. "There it is! The *Hercules!*"

It took a moment for Iyaka to realize that he was gazing, not at the far wall of the enclosure, but at the side of a monster space ship. He swayed forward. Hadley could almost read his thoughts. He saw Citenik's hand come up to shade his eyes, then the upsurging color again, and the hand reaching out to grab Iyaka's shoulder as if to steady himself.

"Commander," he blurted, "Commander, it's *impossible.*"

"Be quiet. It's a deception of some sort intended to frighten us." Iyaka's voice shook, and he almost choked on his glottals. He turned to Hadley. "What is this thing?"

"It is one of our star ships," the Earthman replied matter-of-factly. "It is due to leave in a moment or two. We arranged to delay the departure so that you might see it."

"But you never told me—"

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"You never asked me, Commander," Hadley said softly.

Iyaka was shaken. "Still—we are underground," he murmured.

"As I said, it is not necessary to pass through the atmosphere," Hadley reminded him. "But watch! Any second now—"

Iyaka opened his mouth to speak, and at that instant the *Hercules* disappeared. Where an instant before the giant vessel had towered up into the brilliant lights until its prow was lost in their glare, there now yawned utter emptiness, and the true immensity of the underground dispatch terminal became apparent. The far wall was now clearly visible, perhaps a mile away, and occupying the intervening space were five transmission rings—shimmering polished circlets each a hundred yards in diameter. It was the nearest of these which had just catapulted the *Hercules* on its journey across the galaxy.

"That is how we maintain contact and commerce with the other worlds of our confederation," said Hadley. "It is very quick." Watching Iyaka's and Citenik's expressions, he found that he was enjoying himself at last . . .

"LaGrange talking. Well?"

"They're gone. Iyaka wanted *out* of the dispatch terminal in a tremendous big hurry. They took the whole committee and the troops back to their ship."

LaGrange laughed. "Precisely what did he say?"

"He said Captain Tillikut had summoned him to a conference. He neglected to mention when he'd return."

There was a pause. "Just a second, Hadley. Here's MacKinnon with a message." Hadley heard the rustle of papers. "The Segavas ship just started to leave the Solar System. They have their atomics on full blast, apparently."

"In what direction are they traveling?"

"Back to where they came from, naturally." The scorn of LaGrange's laughter rang free. "We got rid of them without a suggestion of violence, Hadley. *Silly people.*"

Hadley frowned. "Don't laugh, LaGrange."

"But it's damned amusing. Can't you see that?"

"It is right now. But they're not going to stand still, you know. We've no patent on progress. And I guess someday they'll be back, with a clear memory of a certain humiliation. Our grandchildren had better be ready."

LaGrange stopped laughing.

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the quetenestel towers

by . . . Robert F. Young

A vision of beauty becomes a part of the mind that rejoices in its splendor. No wonder the Martian towers menaced Thorton's sanity.

The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.
HENRY DAVID THOREAU

SOMEHOW Thorton had not felt like going with the others. Something in him had rebelled against squandering the last precious hours of his vacation in the flamboyant carnival town across the canal, and he had stayed behind.

It was comfortable there in the late afternoon sunlight, his body propped lazily against the soft grass of the canal bank. It was calm and peaceful, and a million miles from tomorrow. That was where tomorrow belonged, Thorton thought. A million miles—or sixty million, which was the same thing—away. He never wanted it to come any closer.

Beyond the vivid blue of the canal he could see the Quetenestel Towers rising into the violet sky. The mild sunlight had caught their crystalline patterns and transformed them into a dazzling tapestry of light shards. The towers were as integral a part of the Martian landscape as the canal was, Thorton thought.

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They were as endemic as the yellow sea of Martian maize rolling away beyond them to the distant crimson mountains. They looked as though they had been standing there for a million million years, the scintillating culmination of all the art of old Mars. They were the sort of monument you'd have expected a great civilization to leave behind it—the sort of symbol you *wanted* a great civilization to leave behind it.

Quetenestel, according to the little guide book issued by *Interplanetary, Inc.,* had lived during the hedonistic centuries preceding the Martian siroccos. While his contemporaries were frantically burrowing underground, excavating the intricate system of grottoes that were so shortly and tragically to become catacombs, he had made his last defiant gesture against mortality and built his fabulous towers.

Thorton's mind evoked a vivid image of an old and wizened man, his elfin face crinkled by two Martian centuries, his scrawny arms gesticulating, his bird-like voice shrill as he strode back and forth along the canal bank directing the exacting creation of his ultimate masterpiece. Like some fantastic Cheops. Like some alien Ozymandias.

Thorton saw the towers rising, section by shining section, the scintillating columns stabbing ever higher into the swiftly darkening sky; he saw the first drab murk of the dust storms curtaining the horizon. And then he saw the dust-misted years swirl leadenly by, the sun a bloodshot eye in a lowering sky that had forgotten day and remembered only night.

And all the while the timeless towers remained standing, while the blue canals became pitiful striations wrinkling the faces of newborn deserts and the cities became memories choked with dust. Standing, still, when the first survivor poked his blanched face out of his mountain burrow and crept into the slowly brightening sunlight. Standing, sedate and calm, to greet the space-jaundiced eye of the first Earthman to step from the bowels of the first Earth-Mars spaceship.

"You admire the towers, *senir?*"

Very startled, Thorton twisted around. He saw the little Martian peasant standing on the canal path just above him. The peasant bowed in the humble courtesy of his race.

"I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said. "I was but passing to my *batiqueno* when I saw you sitting there contemplating an ancient art form of my race. Without propriety the question rushed to my lips."

"I do admire the towers," Thorton admitted.

"My heart is warmed that you find pleasure in the art of my people. To us the towers are priceless because behind their immortality lies a lesson we shall never forget."

"A lesson?" Thorton's face must have betrayed his interest because

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the Martian, after hesitating a moment, descended the slope and stood before him. "You would like to hear?" he asked.

"Sit down," Thorton said.

"No, *senir*. It is not fitting. I am but a poor tiller of the land while you—you are an Earthman, a dweller in one of the great cities of your planet. But I shall be glad to impart the meager information I possess if you are interested."

His small leathery face was inscrutable, yet Thorton had the uncomfortable feeling that he was being ridiculed. His curiosity, however, was rapidly becoming unbearable.

"I am very interested," he said.

"Thank you, *senir*. I shall tell you about the towers. But first, in order that you may understand, I shall tell you about my people.

"Once we were a big race, a brave, bold race. Much like your own race today, *senir*, though of course not quite so bold, nor nearly so brave. Our culture of that period, judged in the light of the set of values that shaped it, was the glorious consummation of a way of life.

"To use a simple expression, we were object-worshippers. We adored *things*. Not things with meaning behind them; not symbols. But things that we made, things that we built. Vehicles, machines, buildings. Most of all buildings, *senir*. Buildings, and, of course, those agglomerations of buildings—cities.

We loved our tall white edifices with their gleaming façades, their magnificent spires and pinnacles. We lived in them completely. We carried on our lives' work in them, hurrying, when it was necessary, from one to the other, but never for long remaining in the sunlight.

"It was during that period that the Quetenestel Towers were built—"

"No!" Thorton objected.

The Martian looked at him puzzledly. "Why do you shout 'No', *senir?*"

"Because an age like that simply can't produce art."

"But that age produced the Quetenestel Towers."

"You must be mistaken!"

"Possibly, *senir*, but I do not think so."

Thorton waited for him to go on. But the Martian stood there quietly, a strange reticence in his opaque brown eyes. Thorton became impatient. "You mentioned a significance behind the towers," he prompted. "A lesson."

"I did, *senir*. Primarily, the towers signify that which they unequivocally state. Are you familiar with our simple language?" Thorton shook his head. "It does not matter. You will observe the first tower. In a bizarre fashion it resembles the 'K' in your alphabet. Actually it is a gigantic symbol for our language sound 'Q.' The second tower, comparable to the inverted 'N' in your alphabet, is our way of indicating the sound 'Ten.'

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Then there is the symbol, very much like your 'S,' except that its curve is less pronounced, which—"

"Are you trying to say—" Thorton began. Then he stopped, wordless. He was staring across the canal, not quite believing, yet desperately wanting to believe, wanting to be the first Earthman to make the amazing discovery.

"I am trying to say, *senir,* that the Quetenestel Towers are the word 'Quetenestel' spelt out, on a prodigal scale, in the symbols of our simple alphabet."

"I'll be damned!" Thorton was frozen in an attitude of intense concentration, his whole being focused through his eyes at the suddenly revealed letters which, a moment ago in inane illiteracy, he had believed to be towers. And yet, paradoxically, they were still towers, and still beautiful despite his disillusionment.

"To think," he said, "that all this while people have come here sightseeing, that some, like myself, have come here for the express purpose of seeing those towers, and all the while no one knew, no one dreamed— But why? Why didn't you, or others of your race, tell us?"

"No one asked us, *senir.*"

Thorton sat there quietly for a long time. Finally he said, "You implied a deeper significance, a lesson—"

"Yes, *senir.* Object worship flourished during the centuries immediately preceding the dust storms. As I have explained, we were devoted to material objects Nothing to us had value unless it had been manufactured by ourselves, unless it was immediately pleasing to the eye, and had, supposedly, a necessary function to perform.

"Also, as I have explained, we loved our buildings and our cities most of all. We spent our long cool evenings drinking our clear incomparable wine, looking up from our sidewalk cafes at tall stately façades, at pinnacles lost in the stars. While it lasted, *senir,* it was a pleasant way of life. But, of course, it could not last.

"When the dust storms came we burrowed underground. We could not take our buildings or our objects with us. We had to leave our lovely houses and our beloved cities to the mercy of the wind and the dust. And the wind and the dust were not merciful.

"No race can continue to maintain an ideal that is not durable, that will not forbear turning into a rusty hulk or a pile of misshapen ruins the day after tomorrow. When the remnants of my people crept out into the sun they saw nothing of their adored cities, nothing of their cherished objects. They saw nothing but—"

Suddenly the Martian knelt and plunged one hand into the ground. He scooped up a handful of dark red silt and let it trickle through his fingers.

"All of my people today, *senir,*

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are tillers of the soil. We live as closely to the soil as we can get. When we crept forth from our burrows we found our heritage and humbly accepted it. The land."

"But the towers—" Thorton said.

"Yes, yes, *senir*. The towers. They too remained. The towers and the dust. There is always an exception to prove every rule, but seldom has a rule been proven as ironically as the towers proved this rule . . . When we looked across the desolation of our land and saw the towers, we knew in our hearts that we would never build another building, or another city."

"But why?"

The Martian pointed across the canal. Dusk had begun to creep down from the crimson mountains, across the yellow fields of maize. The towers stood, pale and cold and lonely. At their feet the neon veins of the carnival town had begun to glow. "Look at them, *senir*. Read them. Can you not see why?"

"I see four tremendous letters of your alphabet immortalizing the name of the artist who constructed them," Thorton said.

"Artist?"

"Certainly. The fact that he used his own name in the configuration of his masterpiece doesn't in the least detract from his genius. Egotism is typical of all great artists, and Quetenestel undeniably was a very great artist. The fact that his towers were the only buildings to survive the siroccos merely accentuates his greatness."

The Martian was staring at him oddly. "I keep forgetting, *senir*, that you are unfamiliar with our history, that you do not understand our language . . . Why did you come to Mars, *senir?*" he asked abruptly.

Thorton was taken aback. The sudden change of subject caught him off guard and he answered without thinking, without rationalizing.

"Why," he said, "to find something to take back with me."

"Thank you for telling me, *senir*."

"But you don't understand," Thorton said. "It's not what you're thinking. It's nothing simple. It's nothing I can pick up and put into my pocket, or take home and place on my mantel. It's nothing like that—"

"I *do* understand, *senir*. You want something to take home. Something that will make going home easier. You want a memory that will not rust, that will remain clean and shining throughout the quiet years of your life. Something lasting that you can hang on to when doubts assail you. A touchstone that your own civilization is unable to provide." He lowered his eyes, staring at the dark red soil in his thin hand. "All of us are like that, *senir*."

The Martian raised his eyes again. "I am proud that my humble race is able to lend you such a

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touchstone," he said. He stood up slowly. Then he raised one arm in a wide gesture. "The Quetenestel Towers, *senir*. Take them. Quetenestel was, as your guidebook states, a famous Martian artist. If, when my people gaze upon his masterpiece, they know that they shall never build again, it is because they are ashamed of their clumsy hands. It is because they are afraid that their noblest efforts can never touch the consummate art work of the master."

He bowed. "I am sorry to have disturbed you," he said. "I was but passing to my *batiqueno* when I saw you sitting here. I am grateful for the time of day you have so graciously granted me. And now, *quis san foruita*. Farewell."

He turned and started tiredly up the slope to the canal path.

"Wait," Thorton said, rising. He felt vaguely dissatisfied, vaguely afraid that something essential had escaped him. But the Martian did not pause. He climbed up the slope to the path and walked down the path, blending finally into the deepening evening shadows.

Thorton would have followed, but he heard the high-pitched drone of the returning launch and knew that the others were on their way back from the carnival town.

He waited there on the canal bank, and when the launch came in he helped his wife and his son up the slope, losing, in the sudden cessation of the afternoon's loneliness, some of the doubts that had infiltrated his mind. He took his wife's arm and his son's small hand and walked with them and the rest of the tourists back to the neat row of prefabricated cottages facing the canal.

Behind him the kaleidoscopic veins of the carnival town flowed brightly through the intensifying night. And then—Thorton paused on his small front lawn to watch—liquid light leaped vividly through the huge vowels and consonants of the Quetenestel Towers, etching their creator's name in purest scarlet against the star-haunted Martian night.

And suddenly Thorton's heart was full. Suddenly he was able to face tomorrow. His vacation had not been in vain. He had his touchstone.

The matter probably would have ended there, and Thorton doubtless would have endured the abyss of time separating him from his next vacation with more patience and equanimity than he could usually summon to meet the rigors of civilized living. If he had not been curious; if, deep, deep in the innermost reaches of his mind there had not lurked one tiny nagging doubt.

He had been home less than two months when the Tri-Planetary Historical Society announced the opening of the first Martian micro-film library in Lesser New York. Thorton spent a whole week doing battle with himself. He presented himself with a hundred excellent reasons

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why it would be a waste of time for him to sit in a long narrow room ruining his eyes over 3-D films, listening to prosaic descriptions of a planet he had seen at first hand.

"What can they tell me about Mars?" he asked himself again and again. "I've been there!"

The libro-specialist in the long narrow room—the Q—S room—said: "What topic, sir?"

Thorton was embarrassed. "The Quetenestel—" he began. Somehow he could not say the rest.

"Oh, the towers," the girl said. "Won't you sit down, sir?"

He was sweating. The seat was supposed to be form-adjusting, yet it failed utterly to align itself to his shifting posture. The long room darkened and abruptly there was the blue canal flowing slowly across the 3-D screen before him, and just beyond it the crystalline towers rising, with patches of violet sky showing exquisitely between their delicate fretworks.

A wave of such poignant nostalgia swept over him that he felt that the room could no longer contain him, the room, or Earth for that matter; that he must get up and flee; run down the grassy bank of the canal and plunge into the blue blue water, striking out with long strong strokes toward the magic pinnacles waiting forever on the farther shore.

"The Quetenestel Towers," the narrator's flat voice said: "a remarkable example of Martian mass art dating from the last century of the old modernism. Formerly and romantically believed to represent the attempt of a poet-architect named Quetenestel to immortalize himself by spelling his name in grandiose letters along the *Suriul* canal.

"Actually an example of the advertising ingenuity—and the extravagance—of a huge Martian winery. The Quetenestel Vintners. The towers bear a startling resemblance, when properly understood, to the much smaller neon lettering used to promulgate similar products on Earth during the twentieth century."

"Is something wrong, sir?"

Thorton realized that he was standing. "No, no. Nothing," he said.

Somehow he found his way out of the room into the corridor. He walked down the corridor to the elevators and descended to street level.

They crawled out of their burrows into the sun, he kept thinking. *Into the sun, and they saw the dust covering their broken cities. And in all their land nothing stood except the towers, the towers immortalizing the vintage they had drunk for centuries to rationalize their brick and mortar civilization . . .*

Thorton stepped through the street entrance into the bleak November sunshine. He saw the naked street and the tall white buildings lining it. And the people hurrying. He shuddered.

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when blindness strikes

by . . . Winston Marks

When blindness strikes even the brightest of human dreams may give birth to a nameless tyranny.

IT WAS done, over, finished. The horrible purpose had been achieved. The carefully nurtured cultures of mistrust and hatred finally had succeeded beyond the most perverted dreams of the commintern.

Tens of millions of Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Orientals and others lay maimed or dead—dead in the land of the free, the home of the brave.

In some remote backwashes, victims still swung from limbs of trees, ropes inexpertly knotted around their unbroken necks, their faces black and contorted from the slower strangulation.

Other thousands lay yet unburied. The smell of human rot was everywhere, for no street or alley was unstained with fly-covered puddles of human blood, no city or village had yet entirely removed all its grisly debris. There were even greater problems now, no time for the dead, scant comfort for the living.

Yes, now the great dividend of the massacre rolled unexpectedly into the communist coffers. Pandemic blindness swept the North American continent. The shadow

Like Lord Dunsany, Winston Marks can trace his lineage straight back to the bright-sceptered Kings of Elfland, and he has few peers as a master of fantasy trippingly light and enchanting. But Mr. Marks can be somber too, extracting from the acrid rind of reality so profoundly terrifying a vision of that-which-must-never-be you'll never once doubt its starkly prophetic validity.

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of darkness sifted into the eyes of the living like a cosmic soot, striking seemingly at random, man and woman, laborer and scholar, the aged and the young.

Even as the loathsome stupidity of mob rule dissipated, the cold panic of national fear took its place; the fear of the mysterious retribution that paralyzed the optic nerve and sent individuals, families, whole communities reeling into Stygian blackness, where there was no tiniest spark of sun, no stars, no moon, no faintest gray of dawn.

DR. THOMAS JOHNSON, President Emeritus of a large medical school, dean and patron saint of modern psychiatrists, clutched the edges of the lectern, panic rising within him. He felt dizzy and faint as he awaited the quieting of the United States Senators and Representatives.

However, to them who still retained their vision, the beloved old man appeared a rock of quiet dignity, a pillar of strength and sanity in the ocean of sorrow and shame that spread at his feet.

It was a lengthy wait before the noise from the floor subsided, for at the last moment, dozens of blinded legislators had insisted in being guided to the chambers to hear Dr. Johnson address the joint meeting of the House and Senate.

At last a voice at his shoulder said, "You may begin, Dr. Johnson, if you wish."

Someone pressed a glass of water into his hand and he drank gratefully.

"Gentlemen," he began simply, with emotion in his strong voice, "I have been pressed to give the official opinion of the medical world on the epidemic blindness which afflicts more than half of our population, and which appears to continue to spread.

"This opinion has long since been fully published in the press and over the air, so my words are largely a confirmation of what you already know.

"The condition is entirely functional. It is a simple, psycho-somatic symptom, deriving from hysteria and mental trauma. In shorter words, the brain has come to reject the continual visual shocks that besiege it on every hand."

He paused to allow them to absorb his words. Then he went on deliberately, "Such is my report. But I appreciate that your purpose in calling me here today was more than this.

"You are hoping to hear words of encouragement, words of hope, perhaps even words that will lead to a miracle cure of some kind. You want me to speculate on the duration of this terrible seizure, to give you assurances and some fragments of confidence that our chaos will come to an early end. I shall do my best.

"First, I must accept a responsibility. Gentlemen, the publication

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of my views previously may very well have been heavily responsible for the quick spread of the epidemic!"

He paused, his lips tightening.

A surprised stir rustled from the assembly.

"As you know, I hold firmly to the view that an emotion of guilt is the principal basis of the psychosis which has us in its grip. Individuals who took an active part in the slaughter of our minority groups number the largest part of our afflicted. A few of these went blind before the pogrom ended, and it was my published explanation of the guilt-complex that broadcast the epidemic. My comment was that the typical attack of blindness was *reasonable evidence of direct guilt.*

"This was the most unfortunate assertion of my career! When my charge stared out of the headlines at the whole nation, the eyes of the mob, which could tolerate any bloody horror, became once again the eyes of the individual who stood accused.

"Yes, the mob, which has no conscience, dispersed into men who do have consciences. And these men read from my words their sentences for their crimes: Blindness. My suggestion fell upon brains already hypnotized by the shock and remorse and self-loathing."

Now individual voices were causing islands of commotion. Even as he spoke, men were still going blind in his very audience. When the confusion reached a minimum he continued.

"In our psychiatric wards, the pitifully few we have been able to treat have yielded a number of releases or cures. Some cases have proved easily broken, but a distressing fact has emerged. The only cures we have effected are among patients who had merely *condoned* the violence, and who *had not participated directly.*" He hammered out the words with emphasis.

"Surely, even such cures are important, and we must treat them as quickly as possible. These people are sorely needed to help the less fortunate ones."

Once again he paused and thought: *Perhaps I can bring about a few such recoveries at this time, in these chambers. I must try.*

The great vaulted chamber was still.

"First, know this: The fact that you suffer the blindness is proof that you have a deep-seated sense of right and wrong. You are essentially a moral person. No matter what temporary insanity led you to condone the murder of innocents, there was always something solidly decent in your subconscious mind that abhorred the persecutions.

"If this were not so, you could have remained aloof. You would have suffered no conflict between your momentary brutal convictions and your life-long sense of morality. Without this conflict, blindness could not have struck at you.

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"Therefore, hear this: From the bottom of my heart, I pronounce every blind person in this assembly to be basically good of heart. Your past blindness has been ample proof of the remorse and contrition of your earlier thoughts and acts. So, when I clap my hands twice, *open your eyes and see!*"

He brought his hands together before him, and the microphone picked up the two sharp reports and exploded them through the auditorium with ear-splitting intensity.

The echo had scarcely stopped reverberating when a voice from the floor split the dramatic silence. "I can see! My God, I can see again!"

Then another voice from a different section screamed with relief. Then another and another.

There was the bedlam of a revival meeting at first. Dozens of throats screamed and sobbed as person after person felt the balm of absolution and caught the powerful impact of the suggestion as it was emphasized by the testimony of other shouts.

Dr. Johnson stood calmly throughout the tumult waiting for the inevitable. Gradually an undertone of muttering swelled in an ominous counterpoint to the jubilant shouts of joy as the uncured realized that they were not among the chosen ones. Before the muttering grew too loud, Dr. Johnson held up his hands for silence, then, realizing that the gesture was meaningless to many, he spoke loudly into the P. A. system to gain attention.

They gave it reluctantly, and the roar diminished to a low enough level to enable him to continue.

"Some of you have already gained back your sight. Others of you who have actually raised your hands in violence still lack the courage to face the visual evidence of your deeds.

"What hope can I offer to these poor souls?"

He bowed his head, and his slender shoulders sagged as if under the burden of their collective suffering. His gentle face showed a compassion that wet the eyes of all who could see it. "I will not mislead you," he said slowly. "We have not yet freed a single patient from the blindness when the patient admits that he committed a racial murder himself.

"We have tried everything. We have sought to mitigate the acute guilt-pain by careful reiteration of the principles of mob psychology. We have shown these people the evidence that the whole massacre was the result of direct communist machinations.

"We have pointed out that all the original murders were coldly planned and executed by a foreign power; that the riots were entirely the product of subversive agents and provocateurs; that the atrocities by members of so-called inferior groups were staged to invoke

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our deepest and most savage instincts of survival and revenge.

"We have submitted these cases to the courts and received legal absolution from the charges of first-degree murder for each patient.

"But to no avail."

Dr. Johnson's knuckles grew white where he gripped the lectern.

"The man who struck his fellow American with a weapon, who cheered while the knives and axes hacked living flesh before his eyes, and who submitted his body and mind to the carnage, however briefly, however insanely—this man who now finds himself blind is suffering a shock of such unprecedented severity that the medical world has no standard by which to predict its intensity or permanency.

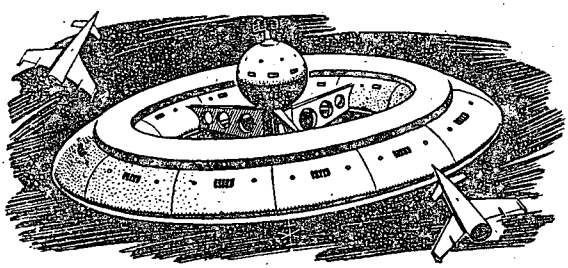
"It is, I suppose, only in a land which has known the meaning of mercy that such a thing could occur—where a citizen will pay with his eyesight for the despicable deed that has ravaged Asia and Europe with no such phenomenon of national conscience.

"It may be—we hope it shall be—that time will reduce the horror. Perhaps these unfortunates will become available to treatment as the nation returns to normal. I can give no assurances at this time, however. I—I sincerely wish I could. With all my heart I wish it."

Soft sounds deep in the throats of hundreds of men swelled into a murmur of despair that drew deeper lines on Dr. Johnson's sensitive face. He stood facing the moaning tide of sound, and the pain gnawed at his entrails.

"We have done a terrible thing," he concluded in a voice that broke finally. With grave humility he said, "Whether absolution is ours to ask for, I cannot decide. I can only plead—may God have mercy on our souls!"

He turned, tears streaming from his old eyes, and groped for the arm of his attendant, groped with the typical widespread, helpless fingers of the recently blinded.



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the mental coin

by . . . Richard R. Smith

Under the Sarks' expert guidance everyone on Earth had a task to perform. But the Sarks' own task was a chill, dreadful secret.

SWEAT WAS an acrid, salty taste in his mouth. His heart beat wildly, his flesh burned faintly. He opened his eyes and stared at the brilliant light in the low ceiling. Frantically, he searched his mind and found . . . *nothing.*

He rose on trembling legs and examined the room.

The ceiling was smooth and blank except for the one light and a small ventilating grille. The floor was devoid of any furniture. Three walls were chalky white, smooth and bare. The fourth was an energy screen. He ran his fingers over the smooth, hard flow of energy. It was opaque, and it reached from floor to ceiling, and from wall to wall. It was completely impenetrable.

He was hopelessly and terrifyingly trapped.

He pressed quivering fingertips to his temples. What had happened to his memory? Who was he? Where was he? When he searched his pockets he found nothing. With a sensation of futility, he removed his clothing and painstakingly ex-

Through the medium of science fantasy we are privileged to see human life on this planet through a kind of miraculous prism mirroring worlds of experience that would be either glorious or intolerable in reality. An Utopia, ideally conceived, can be truly dazzling. But brilliant young Richard R. Smith is more fascinated by the darker aspects of tomorrow. With a narrative persuasiveness that has at times an almost Wellsian vigor he has here pictured a world enslaved by an alien tyranny as terrifying as it is heartbreakingly pitiable.

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amined it. It was a gray tunic, nothing more, nothing less. There were no names or initials stitched into the cloth.

He sat on the floor and tried to think. He could remember cities, social customs, models of cars and books. But he *couldn't remember anything associated with his identity.*

Pain ripped through his flesh like the jagged edges of a broken bottle. It explored his eyes and squeezed with steel fingers. It struck his back with the force of a whip and his arms and legs throbbed with torment as if the bones were broken.

He kept his self-control as long as he could. Then . . . he screamed.

He listened as the screams echoed in the empty room. It was an oddly satisfying sound, an outlet for the agony in his body. He sank to the cool floor, pressed his body against the hard substance and waited for the pain to end.

After what seemed an eternity, the throbbing agony of his flesh ceased and he rose weakly to a sitting position, his entire body tingling from the effects of the torture rays.

A faint swishing sound broke the silence.

He turned abruptly to look at the energy screen. A plate of food slid through the opaque current, and a man's hand appeared. With a despairing cry, he threw himself at it. Instantly, soundlessly, it vanished.

Dumbly, he explored with his fingers the spot where the hand had disappeared. Obviously it was a one-way energy screen. Objects could be thrust into the room but he couldn't pass through the screen from his side. But how was the man able to withdraw his hand when once a part of it was on the other side? Could a small section of the screen be deactivated and remain opaque while momentarily losing its force?

He examined the food. The plastic plate was filled almost to overflowing with pork chops, apple sauce, green peas, bread and butter. A box of milk rested on the plate's edge. But there were no knives, forks or spoons.

That at least was a clue. They thought he *might* kill himself. He had reason to kill himself, then? Or was he mistaken about its being a clue? Perhaps he was the type of person who would commit suicide to avoid torture. Would he be tortured again if he did not destroy himself? The memory of the agony made him shudder.

He ate slowly, and with as much dignity as he could summon, although he felt starved. Dignity! That was something he must remember. He must act normally, with complete outward composure. He must do so because *they* were beyond the screen and could see him.

He finished the meal and drank the small container of milk. Before he placed the box on the floor,

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he noticed the bright red letters: Servo. *Servo Milk Company.* He was still on Earth, however cruelly and deviously he had been trapped.

He said carefully, "Why are you torturing me?"

There was no answer.

He waited a few minutes and then asked more loudly, "Who am I?"

Again—silence.

He shouted, *"Why did you torture me?"*

His body trembled violently in the silence which ensued.

"You inhuman devils! You—" He screamed insults and exhausted his vocabulary of colorful adjectives which was not a small one.

Once more the torture rays bathed his body with their almost unbearable torment, seemingly twice as powerful as before. He screamed in agony as the invisible lashes of fire swept across him. He wouldn't last long, he knew. *They* couldn't know what it felt like. The pain would drive him insane. No one could endure it for long.

Abruptly, the torture rays ceased, and the light in the ceiling dimmed slowly. In a few seconds, he was in complete darkness.

In the long silence that followed, he made several deductions. The most important one was that his captors would kill him at the end of a week. It was a matter of logic: One hundred and twenty years ago, the Sarks had landed on Earth. For the privilege of living on Earth, they had reluctantly given their hosts dozens of their inventions.

The Memo was one of the most useful: a gigantic machine now owned by the FBI that made murder without detection almost impossible. Every man and woman in the United States had a personal file in the Memo machine. The *file* was a thin wire, the thickness of a hair and a foot long. Electrical emanations from an individual's brain were recorded on his personal file.

When that individual died, the FBI ran the wire through a translator that converted the electrical imprints into visual, auditory and thought-record documents. These records enabled the authorities to see exactly what the deceased had seen, hear what he had heard and even read what he had thought during his last week of life. In the majority of cases, the records showed precisely whom the slain individual's murderer was or gave definite clues as to his identity.

A person's file was only a week long—and it was a continuous record. As micro-electrical impulses were recorded at one end of the thin wire, they were erased at the other end. Therefore, a murderer could succeed with his crime if he kept the victim from seeing him and thinking about him for an entire week.

So far, he hadn't seen his captor. The erasure of his memory would prevent him from thinking about his murderer's identity. After

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a week, the record of his antagonist's identity would no longer be on the Memo file and his captor could kill him without danger to himself.

The Memo does not vanquish murder, he thought. *It only makes it a more involved process!*

As quietly as possible, he removed his shirt and wrapped it around his fist.

The ceiling was low, a few inches above his head. He smashed his fist against the light in the ceiling, so violently that fragments of thin glass cut through the cloth, and bit into his knuckles. The remaining fragments fell to the floor with soft tinkling sounds.

Very deliberately he arranged the cloth around his fingers and probed at the wiring in the uncovered recess. Testily, he crossed some wires, and almost instantly sparks spurted from the recess with a crackling sound and burned his face and forehead.

He prayed he had blown every fuse in the building and whirled toward the energy screen. It was gone. As he had suspected, by blowing the fuses, he had robbed the screen of its power-source.

The room beyond his prison was large, and dimly lit by moonlight that streamed through two oval windows. It was completely empty. He ran across the room and tried the door at the other side, his lips tightening when he discovered that the portal was securely locked.

Someone was moving stealthily about in the hall beyond the darkened room, his footsteps nearing the shadowy door.

How many minutes did he have? He tried a window. It, too, was locked and he could see no way to open or break it.

The running footsteps stopped outside the room's door—stopped abruptly.

His mind whirled and his eyes scanned the dim room, searching for some clue to his captor's identity. Was escape impossible after coming this far? The furniture was small, and he noticed a strange, sweet odor.

A key fumbled in the door's lock, and the next instant, beside a small desk, a wastepaper basket gleamed in the moonlight. It was an abnormally large basket—an incongruity beside the desk.

His laughter whispered across the room. Surely, if he ever did escape, that basket would give them something to think about!

He leaped across the room, paused briefly before the wastepaper receptacle and then deliberately stepped into it.

II

HIS FEET touched the matter-transmitter at the base of the basket and passed completely through it. His pulses beginning to pound, he raised his arms above his head and *fell.*

The sides of the basket scraped flesh from his body. Shouting with

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the pain, he struck a conveyer belt and rolled on his back.

A moment later he was staring up at thousands of matter-transmitters that constantly poured the discarded items of an entire city on an endless belt. As the conveyer carried him swiftly to an unknown destination, a flood of paper, half-eaten food, torn clothing, and various unsavory articles of refuse fell upon him. By the time he lost consciousness, he was completely covered by refuse.

"That was smart!" a voice commented.

He stared up in bewildered alarm at green eyes in a fleshy, round face.

"Where am I?" he whispered, hoarsely.

"Don't you remember?" the fleshy individual said. "You got the brilliant idea of jumping into a wastepaper basket. You're the first captive this week to think of it. At this moment you're in the Central Disposal Plant."

He rubbed trembling fingers across his forehead as memory flooded his mind. He had escaped! It wasn't an original idea. Years ago, a highly intelligent friend of his youth had fallen into a wastepaper basket when intoxicated and had described the experience to him at considerable length.

Matter-transmitter wastepaper baskets were another gift of the generous Sarks. Millions of baskets throughout the country were efficiently linked to certain Disposal Plants. All discarded items placed in the baskets were in due course transmitted to a Plant where they were sorted by intricate Robotic equipment. Metals were carried by conveyer belts to furnaces where they were melted and re-used, while paper and cloth were carefully arranged in stacks and carried to book manufacturers and magazine publishers. Lesser items of value were transported to Salvage Shops where they were sold to Morons. Vegetable and animal matter was carried to fertilizer factories.

The Sarks had provided the country with an economical disposal system which not only paid for itself but completely eliminated waste and eased the strain on Earth's dwindling natural resources.

He noticed that his wounds had been dressed. Wearily, he rose and sat on the edge of the cot.

"Why did you do it, Mister?" the round-faced man asked when he noticed the gray trousers. "What happened to your shirt?" He shook his head sadly. "Why an Intelligence would want to jump in the city's junkyard is beyond me!"

Intelligence.

The word reminded him that he didn't know *what* he was! Was he Moron, Norm or Intelligence? He wore the gray of an Intelligence but clothing could be, and often was, stolen. For the first time, he noticed the stranger's yellow clothing. The man was—a Norm.

There was nothing surprising

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about that, of course. An attendant in a Disposal Plant would *have* to be a Norm. Such a job required more thought than a Moron was capable of, and yet it was far too lowly for an Intelligence.

"We have a rule here, Mister," the Norm said. "Anyone who uses a basket to get to a Plant has to have a memory erasure. The Sarks don't want the possibility known publicly because it's too dangerous. You could have killed yourself. You're damn lucky the Sarks put in gadgets to take care of guys that get here. Otherwise, you might have been carried to the furnaces and—"

He shuddered inwardly at the prospect of losing more memory. Already, he couldn't remember anything at all about his identity. And now, this stranger wanted to take away even his recollection of his escape!

The attendant pushed a button on a small table, and with clocklike precision and only the faintest of whirring sounds, a gleaming machine entered the room.

"Don't try to fight it, Mister," the Norm warned. "It's got a paralysis gadget in it. You try to run and it'll freeze you."

He watched with a cold knot in his stomach as the machine extended its metal tentacles toward his skull. He was too weak to resist, or even to cry out in protest.

"While the machine's working on you," the Norm said, "I'll see if I can't find a shirt for you. You can't leave here like that!"

The attendant sauntered from the room as if animated by an automatic compulsion, and with no particular destination in mind. *Typical Norm,* he thought bitterly.

He closed his eyes as the machine's cold metal tentacles pressed against his skull. Intangible tendrils drifted through his maze of thoughts and memories. They searched, found what they wanted and slashed with faint, delicate beams of electricity. In numb despair he watched the machine as it rolled from the room.

Where was he? How had he arrived in such a dismal predicament? He frowned and tried to recall. He remembered the torture and his desperate attempt to escape from it. He could even remember his elation when the attempt had succeeded, but he couldn't recall how he had accomplished it.

The attendant returned to the room and extended a torn brown shirt. "This is the only garment I could find," he explained. "I'm sorry it had to be a Moron's shirt. But I guess it's better than nothing."

He accepted the shirt and slipped into it. Bells chimed somewhere in the distance, and the attendant frowned.

"Company. I'll be back in a minute. You rest awhile. That operation always leaves people a little dizzy from shock."

Once more, he was alone. In

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desperation he stared at the half-open door, dirty yellow walls and rumpled cot. His mind struggled to find something that no longer existed.

Distant voices drifted to his ears.

"Yeah, he's here."

"Where?"

There was a muffled reply, and footsteps clattered in the hall. He realized with dawning horror that only one person would know where to find him—his antagonist!

He sensed the weakness in his body and knew he was too fatigued to fight or even to struggle against a recapture. In frantic alarm he crossed the room as fast as his rubbery legs would carry him, and jerked open the door.

The street outside was dark, chillingly empty. Quietly he closed the door behind him, and ran down the street, his shoes making hollow, echoing sounds on the concrete. Voices shouted orders for him to stop, but he only ran the faster.

Two yards to his left the street suddenly erupted in a blaze of red flame and a cascade of stones struck his back as he turned into an alley. He stumbled on through the dark shadows, his heart beating like a trip-hammer, his lungs gasping for air.

The alley emptied into a main street. The instant he emerged on its wide expanse he mingled with the throng of people and assumed a normal gait. The sidewalks were filled with a mixture of Norms and Morons. He observed with a shudder the blank, stupid expressions of the Morons. Their brown tunics were wrinkled, torn and dirty, and they walked with slow shuffles, staring vacantly at the men and women about them.

He wasn't a Moron. Of that he was sure. His reactions were quite different from theirs. He felt alert and poised like a steel spring ready to leap at the slightest provocation.

The superiority of the Norms to the Morons was plainly visible. The Norms walked faster, and their eyes gleamed with a hazy alertness. Quite as important, their clothes were never dirty, torn or patched even though they did not wear expensive clothing.

He decided he was either Norm or Intelligence—more probably an Intelligence.

There were no Intelligences visible, but that occasioned him no surprise. Intelligences did not mingle with Morons and Norms under normal circumstances. They lived on the outskirts of cities and usually worked in huge office buildings in the country.

A neon sign glared with light and caught his attention. *Mental Coins, One Credit.* Another gift of the Sarks, he reflected, remembering that the Sarks *sold* intelligence to humans in the form of pills the size of a dime.

He paused before the store window and glanced at the room beyond. As always, there were no attendants visible—only a me-

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chanical dispensor. A long line of customers stood before the machine, and as he watched an elderly Norm slipped a five-credit bill into a slot and received change and a Mental Coin. The Norm swallowed the pill immediately.

How do they do it? he wondered.

A Norm or an Intelligence could buy a Mental Coin from any one of thousands of Sark shops. After he swallowed the pill, the purchaser remained decidedly more alert and intelligent for an entire day.

It was a vicious circle. Intelligences earned more money than Norms and Morons. Therefore, they were able to buy a larger amount of Coins, and because of the Coins, their intelligence was continually higher than a Norm's. It followed as a corrolary that because their intelligence was greater, they earned more money . . .

Morons were the worst victims of the cycle. Because they were stupid, they lived in barracks, went without most luxuries and earned very little money. Because they earned little money, they couldn't afford many or *any* Mental Coins. Because they couldn't afford the Coins, they remained dumb. Because they were dumb, they earned very little. Statistics showed that only one Moron in a thousand rose to the status of Norm.

The Norms were the normal, average people. They lived in apartment houses, had a few luxuries and jobs that required some thought. Because they earned a fair salary, they bought a steady amount of Coins to maintain their average intelligence. Because they had an average intelligence, they continued to earn their average salaries . . .

The Norm class was the easiest to leave. If a Norm was lazy, he could very easily slip into the Moron class from which there was almost no return. Or, by hard work and initiative, a Norm could rise to the level of Intelligence.

The facts were hard and cold: Intelligences remained Intelligences. Norms could become Intelligences, Morons or remain Norm. Morons remained Morons.

What was he?

A hand gently touched his arm, and he turned to stare.

She was pretty. Dark brown hair she had—and her eyes were deep and blue and unwavering. There were little dancing lights in them, and her face was smooth and young. *Her face is too smooth,* he thought irrelevantly.

She whispered, barely moving her moist crimson lips, "Pretend you know me."

"Well, hello!" he exclaimed.

He took her hand and squeezed it. Her fingers were soft and cold. She tugged faintly on his hand, indicating the direction she wanted him to go.

He listened with pretended interest as she talked about people neither of them knew. *A good act,*

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he thought with admiration. *But who is she afraid of?*

She stopped before a crumbling apartment house. "Would you care to come in for awhile?" she asked politely.

"Certainly," he replied, without hesitation.

In silence, they climbed the creaking staircase to the third floor. The building was dirty, its wallpaper peeling in large sections. He heard babies crying, men and women arguing in loud voices, TV sets blaring.

He noticed that some of the people who passed them wore the brown clothing of Morons; others the more conspicuous yellow of Norms. The girl, whatever her station and reason for helping him, had been wise in choosing a Borderline House. When they left they could disguise themselves as either Morons *or* Norms, making it doubly difficult for their adversaries to recognize them. He felt completely confident on that score.

On the third floor, she led him into a small apartment and locked the door behind them.

"Sit down," she said. "You need not fear discovery here."

He relaxed his muscles and fell on a faded green sofa.

A layer of dust covered the contents of the room. The furniture was cheap, the ashtrays filled to overflowing and the air had an unhealthy, stale tang. *A room reserved for special occasions such as this,* he thought.

"Have you any cigarettes?" he asked.

She reached into her purse. "No," she replied. "But I have *this.*"

She tossed a small gun on the seat beside him.

"Now," she suggested, "you can kill yourself with dignity."

III

"KILL myself with dignity!" he repeated incredulously.

He studied her face. He was quite sure that she meant it. Her expression was calm, her body relaxed. She didn't have the appearance of an insane person. She stood in the center of the room on shapely legs, her cool eyes surveying him emotionlessly.

Her young bosom rose and fell evenly beneath the glittering blouse. She wasn't excited, and her calmness, in conjunction with the fact that her face and figure were average, added to his bewilderment. She was attractive but without the kind of beauty that would attract attention. Physically, she looked like an entirely normal woman. But what normal woman would ask a man to commit suicide without the slightest sign of excitement?

"You could have killed yourself in the street, but it wouldn't have been very dignified," she said. "After you die, you'll be Earth's greatest hero so you should die in a way that will—"

He waved a restraining hand.

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"Will you explain a few things first?"

"We haven't much time," she warned. "They might come any minute!"

"Just *who* are they?"

"I can't tell you," she replied, quickly. "We don't want them to know that we know."

"What group do you belong to?"

She shook her head. "I can't tell you that either. We don't want it recorded on the Memo machine in Washington."

"Who am I?" he persisted, hoping that she would relent and tell him that much at least.

"You are an agent in a group fighting for Earth," she said. "Your name is unimportant. You and I belong to the same group. I'm your ally."

He laughed bitterly. "You're my ally and you want me to kill myself."

"Don't you understand?" she asked angrily. "You've learned something that will lead our cause to victory when you die. You learned it the day before yesterday. It's recorded on the Memo in Washington. When you die, the FBI will read your file. The things you knew will become public knowledge and we'll win!"

He shook his head violently. It was like playing a game and not knowing the rules while everyone else had the rules memorized.

"How did you know where to find me?" he asked anxiously.

"We knew you were a prisoner but we couldn't rescue you. We tried but we couldn't. However, we did learn how you escaped and we knew you'd be in or near the Disposal Plant. We sent a few of our members to the Plant itself and a few of us waited in the streets outside the Plant. I happened to locate you before the others."

At last, some of the pieces were falling in place. He was the goal of two conflicting groups. *His* group wanted him to die immediately. His enemies wanted him to live for at least a week. Both groups had sent members to the Disposal Plant and his enemies had gotten there first. Now he was with *his* group. And they wanted him to commit suicide . . .

"I don't think you know—" His eyes widened and his speech congealed.

The brown-haired girl had removed another gun from her purse and was aiming it at his chest.

He rolled from the sofa, and grappled with her, so quickly that she had no chance to fire. But the weapon exploded nevertheless, the charge scorching his left ear as it passed close by his head.

He struck the floor, rolled on his back and looked up at the girl a few yards away. The green sofa burned with darting, crackling flames. He fired without hesitation, ripping her arm off at the elbow.

That didn't stop her. She seized a large metal vase with her left hand and raised it to crush his

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skull. He destroyed both her legs with his next two shots. She crumpled to the floor, and lay motionless, her left arm pinned beneath her body, her eyes wide and staring.

He knelt beside her and studied the wide eyes. The floor was covered with wiring and tiny mechanisms that his shots had torn from her body.

"Are you a self-contained automaton or is someone manipulating—"

"We are actually miles away," the robot's feminine voice interrupted. "This android body that you have destroyed is merely a receiver."

"Well, you can at least tell me—"

The robot exclaimed, "For the good of Earth, kill yourself at once!"

Boards creaked in the hall outside the apartment.

He asked rapidly, "Do you know what it was I discovered a few days ago?"

"Naturally not," was the instant reply. "If we did, we would make it public knowledge and the conflict would end. Now even you don't know. Only the Memo knows. You must kill yourself so that the FBI will—"

"I won't kill myself and not know why I'm doing it!" he whispered angrily. "And if you send anybody else to kill me, robot or human, you'll live to regret it."

He decided not to waste more time. He ran across the room, and threw open the door.

The room beyond was a small, filthy kitchen. He climbed through a window, and onto a roof-top. Moving with agile assurance, he crossed several roofs, found a fire escape and descended to a narrow alley. The alley led to the street where he had met the girl.

How long ago that seemed!

Swiftly he mixed with the sluggish crowd, walking aimlessly, his thoughts in a turmoil.

He was a member of a group fighting for Earth. But Earth was not in danger! True, some fanatics disliked the alien Sarks. But they had not harmed Earth. On the contrary, they had helped the planet immensely. They had given Earth the benefit of their superior science, including the Memo which had almost abolished crime, from petty theft to murder.

The Sarks sold intelligence to humans. Their Mental Coins drove the cobwebs from a man's mind and allowed him to think with speed and clarity. They gave cities the economical Disposal Plants that prevented waste of vital industrial materials.

They numbered only thousands, and they had beautiful Reservations for their homes. Earth and the Sarks befriended each other. The Sarks had nothing to do with politics or power. They lived quietly on their Reservations and bothered no one.

If he was in a group fighting for

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Earth, *who* or *what* was it fighting?

A dark blue car screeched to a halt beside him.

IV

HE IGNORED the vehicle and continued walking, crossing the wide thoroughfare diagonally. He had scarcely gone ten paces from the curb when a burly hand gripped his shoulder and turned him around. He looked at the hard face, but avoided the cold brown eyes of the husky man confronting him.

The man escorted him to the car, opened the door, and ordered, "Get in."

He slipped into the back seat, too bewildered by preceding events to be surprised at the Sark who sat with his back against the far side of the stationary vehicle.

The chauffeur was slumped on the front seat. At the Sark's command the man leaned forward and punched a button. As the car lurched away from the curb, a wide rooftop vista swept into view through the car's transparent top. Row upon row of towering apartment houses filled with Norm families were etched in glowing splendor against the deep blue sky. He would be content to be a Norm, he told himself despairfully. A Norm with an average job, a wife and kids, a few private rooms and such luxuries as TV and a microfilm library.

He turned to face the alien.

The Sark was typical of his kind. His body was human in shape but so small that he resembled a child. His skin was an unhealthy pink, devoid of any hair, and when his soft lips moved a girlish voice said, "My name is Ranoffga. I've decided to explain a few things to you."

He watched the alien with a growing interest. It was the first time that he had been this close to one of mankind's benefactors.

"You've no doubt wondered about your treatment lately," Ranoffga said. "The unfortunate truth is—*you are a member of an anti-Sark movement.* Many Earthmen resent us because of our superior science and have tried to find flaws in us. Not being perfect, we *do* have flaws. You discovered some of them and—"

"What are they?" he interrupted quickly.

The alien shrugged his small, bony shoulders. "I cannot tell you. But you may rest assured that what you discovered is unimportant. It concerns only us and does not in any way concern Earthmen. But if Earthmen knew, they would look upon us with disgust."

The Sark's eyelids quivered. "You discovered these things but we captured you before you could inform your organization. We destroyed your memory and planned to free you at the end of a week when the Memo would no longer record your knowledge.

"But, unfortunately, you escaped. We know that one of your

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group contacted you and tried to kill you. And now you are once more under our protection."

Ranoffga sighed as if the explanation was tiring him greatly. "You are in a strange position," he went on. "You were trying to discredit us in the eyes of Earthmen. I can assure you that what you learned would not cause Earthmen to drive us from their planet. But, as I said before, they would look upon us with disgust, and we do not desire that. We wish you no harm, but the fanatical anti-Sark group you belong to will kill you if they are given the chance. They want you to die, so that your Memo file will become public knowledge."

The alien lit a cigarette and blew thin jets of blue smoke through his nostrils. The Sarks, he remembered, continually condescended. They wore human clothing and deliberately adopted many of Earth's customs in an effort to decrease the difference between the two races. They were in all respects the greater race and yet they were the ones who yielded sociologically!

"Does that explain everything?" Ranoffga queried.

He considered. It explained the fantastic cat and mouse game in a vague manner, beyond a doubt. But it failed to enlighten him as to the *specific* knowledge that had placed him in his incredible position.

"One more thing," he asked. "Why did you torture me?"

Ranoffga's eyes flickered for an instant toward the chauffeur's beefy neck, then stared vacantly through a window. "That was regrettable," he conceded. "Our race has to employ Earthmen to perform duties which are unpleasant to us. Usually, we have to employ men who are inherently sadistic. This particular person—a man named Roden—tortured you for his own pathological amusement. He had been instructed only to keep you a prisoner for a week and then to give you your liberty."

The car had reached the outskirts of the city where the Intelligences lived. Their homes were spacious and rambling. The yards were scrupulously clean and they were surrounded by bright green hedges and swimming pools which glittered in the moonlight.

The individual dwellings were spaced well apart. Some were brightly lit with the Intelligences' frequent parties, and he saw beautiful, smiling women in shining dresses and confident men in evening clothes. Their cars were large and gleamed dully. Everyone appeared gay and satisfied. Everyone wanted to be an Intelligence.

But for every Intelligence, there were at least a thousand Norms and a hundred Morons! Statistics showed that every year the number of Intelligences decreased by five percent and the number of Morons increased by seven percent. *Soon*, he realized, Earth would be dominated by the feeble-minded.

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It was logical and obvious. Intelligences, in order to maintain their privileged standard of living, were having fewer and fewer children each year. Fewer children meant fewer expenses and more money for Mental Coins. On the other hand, Morons had nothing to lose—so they multiplied like rabbits.

"Where are you taking me now?" he asked the Sark. "Tell me! I must know."

The alien smiled wryly. "An ancient proverb of your race states that the best place to hide a leaf is in the depths of a forest. Obviously the best place to hide a man is in a large group of men. We're taking you to the Moron Barracks at the Sark Agricultural Project. Your group will not think of looking for you in such a place and at the end of a week, the Memo file will no longer record your knowledge and your life will no longer be in danger. Some of our men will be near you during every moment of your stay at the Barracks. They will protect you from your group, if any of its members should locate you. In the meantime, you will only have to wait and behave like a Moron."

"What's my name?" he asked suddenly.

"At the Barracks, your name will be John Wilson."

"My real name!" he insisted.

The Sark shook his head. "We cannot afford to tell you anything about your actual identity. Surely the reason must be self-evident to you by now."

"Here we are," the chauffeur interrupted.

A neon sign flared in the dark night—*Sark Agricultural Project.*

John studied the fields of Rater as they swayed gently in the faint moonlight. Acres and acres of Rater—an alien crop planted in Earth's soil. Morons cultivated and harvested the fruit for the few dozen Sarks on the nearby Reservation, dutifully carrying out a service rendered by their government in return for many gifts from the Sarks.

The car stopped before a large, three-story Barracks. The building was dark, but a few Morons loitered on the large porch, staring vacantly at the luxurious vehicle.

John Wilson descended in obedience to the Sark's nod, and shut the car door firmly behind him.

He stood for several minutes in the swirling dust and watched the car until it was out of sight. Then he turned and walked toward the Barracks.

V

THE HALL was high-vaulted and somber of aspect. A few yards from the entrance he found a crowded cubicle inhabited by a sleepy-eyed, bored Norm. The clerk glanced up from his magazine with visible reluctance.

"What's your trouble, dope?" he asked.

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Wilson reddened at the insult but decided not to argue. For his own protection, he must behave like a Moron.

"My name is John Wilson," he said. "What's my room number?"

The Norm sneered, his lips forming a wide, silent snarl. "You must *really* be a low-grade Moron! Can't even remember your own room number!" He consulted a faded ledger. "Room three-oh-two," he affirmed. Bunk sixteen. Room three-oh-two is on the third floor."

The room was large. He counted two hundred Morons—men, women and children in the one crowded compartment. The cots were placed a few feet apart, and the only other articles of furniture were metal lockers which stood at the foot of each bed.

He sat on the edge of cot number sixteen and removed his shoes. Instantly the man on the next cot stirred and rolled on his side to face him.

"Hi, John," a voice whispered in the semi-darkness.

"Hi," he replied, with friendly casualness.

"Where you been?" the man demanded.

"Seems like I've been everywhere," Wilson replied. He peered through the darkness until his eyes ached, but the man's features remained hidden by the gloom.

The Sarks were efficient, he realized. He had been in the Barracks only a few minutes and already one of his guards had made himself known. He studied the shadowy forms on the other cots and wondered how many men had been assigned to guard him and if any of them were members of his own group awaiting a chance to kill him.

Despite his unsavory status, he had no trouble sleeping.

As soon as he awoke the next morning, he glanced at the adjacent cot. His new acquaintance was a thin, hawk-faced man with pale, unhealthy features. A tag on the man's cot read, *Henry Farrell.*

The limp form stirred, stretched and yawned, his blood-shot, beady eyes focusing slowly.

"Morning, John," he said, running his fingers through his sparse hair.

"Good morning, Henry," Wilson answered. Farrell accompanied him to the mess hall. Breakfast consisted of eggs and bacon. The large room was filled to capacity and everyone talked at once. The clatter of silverware was deafening.

After the meal, Wilson worked in the fields with the other men and women. Farrell remained constantly at his side and occasionally started a conversation.

"This seems like a lot of fruit for the few Sarks on the Reservation to eat," Wilson stated.

The hawk-faced man wiped beads of sweat from his forehead and explained briefly, "They tell me most of the fruit is useless—

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mere husks. They say the edible portion in each fruit is the size of a peanut."

Acres and acres of the small Rater trees stretched as far as the eye could see in every direction. The fruit was soft and brown, and no larger than a grapefruit. It was easy to pick, and carry a bag of Raters to a truck that waited for a complete load. It was so easy that even a *Moron* could do it.

Another innovation of the Sarks. They had given Earth so many labor-saving devices and automatic equipment that hundreds of thousands of men and women had lost their jobs.

The Sarks had created the deplorable situation, so, obviously they had felt duty-bound to remedy it. *They had remedied it by arranging for a hundred men to do menial tasks that one machine could do just as effectively.*

The men who did this type of work were classed as Morons. They were fed with food raised by other Morons, dressed with clothes made by Morons, and housed in dwellings constructed by Morons. The Morons who were too stupid even for the smallest tasks were kept in Homes. They were fed, clothed and supported by income received by the Sarks from their sale of Mental Coins.

But who had the right to complain? Morons on the Farm were typical of Morons everywhere. They worked only four hours a day and the work wasn't hard physically or mentally. No one held whips over their heads. No one shouted orders at them. Everyone worked as hard as he or she wanted to. The Morons on the Farm were well-fed. They had clothes and shelter, and the only things they lacked were common luxuries and privacy.

The Sarks treated Earthmen better than their own government could. Most people earned a relatively small income, and a small income meant a proportionately small Federal income tax. *Governments couldn't afford to support the unemployed.* So, the Sarks supported them. Who could complain? The Sarks were benefactors of mankind!

During the first day, John successfully assumed the appearance of a Moron. It was easy to shuffle his feet, stare blankly and in general, behave like a zombie.

On the morning of his second day at the Farm, he awoke feeling sluggish. He ate breakfast slowly, his muscles seemingly tired and his skull filled with an intangible heaviness that made thinking difficult.

The sun beat unmercifully down on him as he mechanically picked the Rater fruit. It burned his body with its brilliant glow and squeezed sweat from his flesh. He dragged a bag of fruit to a waiting truck and realized: he wasn't acting like a Moron anymore. *He was becoming one!*

With sleepy, half-closed eyes, he

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watched dully as a truck laden with fruit reached the highway and turned *left*. The fruit was grown for Sark consumption and the Sark Reservation was to the *right*.

The highway reached a dead-end a few miles south and Wilson realized with a vague, confused uneasiness that the truck would run into an impasse which was . . . the City Reservoir. He tried to grasp the thought that eluded him but his mind was too dull.

During the day, his thirst became unbearable. He dropped his fruit bag and shuffled toward a stream at the field's edge.

Abruptly a stocky Norm supervisor blocked his way. "Contaminated water," the man explained briefly. "Can't you read signs? Unless you want your guts eaten out, wait until you get back to the Barracks. You'll find plenty of water there."

That night, John Wilson did not drink any water.

Slowly, alertness crept into the neural patterns of his brain. He lay on his cot and listened to the many discordant sounds that reached his ears through the odor of two hundred sweating bodies. Some of the Morons were conversing, their speech slow, hesitant and rambling from one unimportant subject to another. Some couples whispered the eternal phrases of courtship. Some argued hotly and at least three babies were crying at the same time.

As the hours passed, the sounds of the large room diminished until there was only the collective noise of two hundred people sleeping, snoring and turning restlessly on their cots.

He rolled on his side and studied Farrell's motionless body. Would Farrell kill him when the Memo was clear of his valuable information? Was one of the many dark forms on the cots his ally? Could he be completely sure that his own group did not know where he was?

He rose as quietly as possible, and put on his clothes.

Outside the Barracks, he headed straight for the garages. He knew that the doors would be open, for cars and trucks no longer had ignition keys and locks but were operated by dial-studded buttons. And who would steal a car or truck when the police could use the Memo and present instant proof of his crime?

He opened a garage door, and—heard a faint sound behind him.

He ducked, sidestepped and turned in one continuous flow of motion. But almost as quickly his attacker raised the knife for a second attempt. There was a faint swish, and a muttered curse. Then the moonlight sparkled on a metal blade poised for still another vicious slash.

Wilson reached for the weapon in his tunic. But before he could draw it forth the man before him swayed and crumpled to the ground with a strangled sob.

Something moved in the shadows

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beside the distant Barracks. The Sarks, then, had protected him! "Thank you, Farrell," he whispered.

He dragged the strange ally into the garage, knelt, and felt the man's heart. Clearly Farrell was a good shot, for the would-be assassin was dying.

Carefully, he placed the limp form in a truck, slipped behind the wheel and pushed the accelerator to the floor-board.

When he reached the highway and turned toward the Sark Reservation, the man on the seat beside him stirred and moaned faintly.

Wilson glanced sharply at his attacker's pale face. He was not a young man. Apparently he was in his late forties, for strands of white mingled with the mass of black hair on his head and his face was heavily wrinkled. Beneath the wrinkles, however, his features were curiously soft and smooth. He was the kind of man who should have been smoking a pipe in front of a warm fireplace instead of sitting in a dirty truck with death at his elbow.

"You're dying," Wilson told him. "You can't lose anything by telling me what I want to know."

The form beside him mumbled incoherently.

"If valuable information is recorded on my Memo file, why doesn't someone contact the FBI and have them read the file?"

"They can't . . . machines automatic. They only work when someone d-dies. Even then . . . t-they sort information . . . only give relevant—"

Abruptly, the man beside him sagged limply, his head falling forward, and the breath rattling in his throat.

VI

HE HAD seen pictures of the Reservation but they had not prepared him for the alienness of the place. The grass was blue and scattered across the wide lawns were strange, angular bushes and trees with kaleidoscopic fruit. By comparison, the predominantly green plant growth of Earth seemed dull and monotonous.

The buildings were clustered together as if seeking to draw strength from each other.

He marveled at the alien construction. Tall spires jutted upward from delicate, fairy-like buildings and a labyrinth of lacy, slender bridges tied all the spires and fragile buildings together as if with a kind of magical, glowing twine. The structures were in all the hues of a rainbow and the glowing colors were in perfect harmony as if following some intricate, perfect master-plan.

The lines of the buildings *flowed* in sheer abandonment of space economy. It was obvious that the buildings had been constructed not only for utility but also to give pleasure to the senses. By compar-

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ison, the straight lines of Earth's skyscrapers and homes were like the creations of unimaginative, economy-crazed misers.

Wilson reflected, *No wonder some Earthmen hate the Sarks. No race as conceited as ours wants to admit its own inferiority.*

He walked quickly through the main entrance of the Sarks' living quarters. He was not too surprised to find that Ranoffga and an Earthman were waiting patiently for him in a dimly-lit foyer.

The Sark smiled faintly.

"You've been expecting me?" Wilson asked.

"There are cameras on the grounds," Ranoffga replied. "Every time an Earthman enters the Reservation, robotic equipment notifies me and presents me with a photograph of the visitor. Needless to say, I was surprised to see you. I thought you would prefer the obscurity of the Farm." Ranoffga's eyebrows rose slightly. "Why did you come here?"

"I want to discuss some matters of vital importance with you."

The Earthman seated beside the Sark grunted, and his thick lips twisted in a crooked grin.

Wilson recognized him as the chauffeur he had studied with repugnance a few days before. "You never introduced us, Ranoffga," he chided.

The Sark hesitated before replying in a strained voice, "This is Roden, my assistant."

"The same Roden who entertained me while I was a prisoner?" Wilson queried, needlessly.

Roden's eyes narrowed as he nodded his head affirmatively.

"Follow me," Ranoffga said, his tone more persuasive than commanding.

Wilson followed the Sark to a room on the second floor. The door opened automatically, although it was constructed with a manual lock. Ranoffga stepped into the darkness, manipulated a light switch, and gestured with a pale, trembling hand.

Wilson's breath caught in his throat. It was the same room, light-flooded and blank-walled. As before the familiar energy screen shimmered silently, politely hiding the torture chamber beyond.

"Please be seated," the Sark said with quiet insistence. "We can talk freely here."

Ranoffga sat stiffly in the chair behind the small desk. Roden stood beside him, his muscular arms crossed on his chest, but poised and visibly impatient for action.

"Will you explain now what you have been deliberately concealing from me?" Wilson asked.

The Sark smiled weakly. "Surely you must understand my position! I cannot give you the information you seek until I am sure how much you know."

Wilson laughed bitterly. "I know more than you may suspect. For instance, I know that your people *do not* eat Raters. The fruit is carried to reservoirs and mixed with

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the water. I know too that Sarks have drugged Earthmen and—lowered everyone's intelligence!"

The color drained visibly from Ranoffga's face. "Just how did you learn that?" he demanded.

"Deduction," Wilson replied. "I saw a truck of Raters headed toward the city's reservoir. When I was on the Farm, I wanted to drink from a stream but was prevented from doing so with the excuse that the water was contaminated. More important, my mind was clear and active *until* I had spent some time on the Farm. I knew I'd been drugged simply because I couldn't think clearly. There were only two ways I could have been drugged—either through the food I ate or the water I drank. Everything pointed to the water—"

"We underestimated you," Ranoffga said, his tone unmistakably tinged with admiration.

Wilson grinned. "That knowledge would be fatal to Sarks if it was known publicly, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," Ranoffga conceded.

"How much of what you told me before is the truth?"

The Sark hesitated—and then he shrugged. "Everything except the status of what you discovered before. I told you it was unimportant, and that it didn't vitally concern Earthmen. That was the only lie. What you really discovered almost a week ago was what you recently deduced about the drugged water supply."

Wilson nodded grimly. "Now, will you explain why your race has drugged an entire planet and makes no attempt to control it?"

Ranoffga frowned. "I suppose you are entitled to an explanation. He paused an instant, then went on, choosing his words with care. "In the beginning, Mr. Wilson, our native world was a peaceful place. There was no violence there, no conflict, no savage animals for our ancestors to fear. Our world was peaceful and yet it was barren and desolate. My race had to develop its intelligence in order to survive. Thousands of years ago, when our race was in its infancy, animal and vegetable life was scarce. At a very early age, my race had to learn how to breed animals and cultivate plant life. Our planet's climate was bleak and cold. When we were still primitives, we had to build shelters. Do you understand?"

Wilson nodded his head. He could imagine a bleak, barren world inhabited by frail creatures such as the Sarks. Such a race in such an environment would of necessity have to *develop* its intelligence and *learn* many things or die.

"It's very simple," Ranoffga continued. "My race became intelligent because it had to. It was forced to develop much more aggressively than would have been normal if circumstances had been different. And yet, warfare and violence were unknown to us. My native world is very different than Earth.

"Actually, we developed into a

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race of—*cowards,* you might say. And yet we are not exactly cowards. Remember, warfare and violence were unknown to us! It was inevitable, therefore that when our planet was attacked by aliens we should have found ourselves defenseless. *We did not even know the principles of war.* War was as alien a concept to us as the concept of our sociology is to you.

"We had no weapons or defenses against weapons. But our spaceships were faster than those of our attackers, and we were able to flee. Those of us who escaped landed on Earth."

The Sark's small body quivered, and tears dribbled down his smooth cheeks. "We have no desire to conquer Earth. We want only to be *needed.*"

Wilson almost dropped his cigarette. He stared hard at Ranoffga and repeated incredulously, *"Needed?"*

"Yes. Our race psychology is such that we can never be conquerors or rulers. Our psychology may seem strange to you. But don't forget that human viciousness and aggressiveness seem strange to us. Since we cannot be aggressive we *need* a powerful ally to protect us from our enemies—"

Wilson guessed the explanation. "And you want Earth to fight your wars and defend you because we're brutal?"

"Exactly. Your race can fight. In a few years, our enemies will follow us across space. Our purpose has been to develop the intelligence of a small selected portion of your race. Eventually they will be capable of inventing the weapons necessary to fight our enemies. They will devise weapons that we are psychologically incapable of inventing. And the people of Earth will be our army. Your race is made for fighting."

Wilson's head whirled. The Sarks didn't wish to harm or rule Earth. They wanted only to have Earth as their brave defender!

"And so, you devised a way to make yourselves needed so we'd have to let you remain until we would be fully equipped to fight *your* battles?" he asked.

"Exactly. We gave Earth our greatest inventions, the benefit of our superior science. That did not at first make Earth completely dependent on us, of course, but it did make Earth grateful and it paved the way. As you probably realize, Earth is now wholly dependent on us economically and sociologically. Earth *needs* our science and needs us to support the unemployed that we ourselves caused. And your race needs our Mental Coins. Without them *everyone* on Earth would be a complete Moron! And, only we can make the Coins."

Ranoffga continued with the painful expression of a man confessing a great sin. "A hundred and twenty years ago, we gave every city fully automatic reservoir systems. We didn't build them our-

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selves. We gave men the benefits of our science and showed them how to construct the new plants. They cooperated because, once in operation, the automatic systems provided everyone with enough water and were infinitely more efficient than the old reservoirs."

"And then you planted fields of Rater fruit to put in the water systems to make everyone less intelligent," Wilson said.

"A depressant, yes," Ranoffga confirmed. "We developed the plant especially for that purpose. We waited ten years before we started using the drug. By that time, your FBI and your various police forces had grown tired of inspecting the automatic water systems. After they had been in use for ten years, no one was suspicious of them and everyone took them for granted."

The Sark nodded thoughtfully. "For a hundred and ten years, your race has been drinking a powerful drug. At first, there was hardly any change in a man's intelligence after he drank the water. But gradually, year after year, we increased the dosage. Each year we made the drug a little stronger and each year your race became more stupid. The change in mass mentality was so gradual it attracted little attention."

Wilson tossed his cigarette into a large waste basket at his elbow. "It's remarkable someone didn't discover the drug in the water," he said.

"The drug is undetectable," Ranoffga explained. "Your scientists are not capable of noticing it. Also, we took many precautions against discovery. And naturally, as the drug became more powerful your race became less alert, and the risk of discovery continued to diminish."

"Tell me about the Mental Coins," Roden suggested.

"Oh, yes, our Coins were the final link. They are what made your race dependent on us. They counteract the drug. They don't actually raise a person's intelligence. They act solely as an antidote. But since we lowered your race's intelligence to such a low degree, they have the apparent effect of enormously increasing it. Man now needs the Coins to offset the depressant and raise his intelligence."

"And," Wilson concluded for Ranoffga, "the Coins are the end of the cycle. Earthmen desperately need them. Only Sarks manufacture them and, therefore, your mission is accomplished: Earth *needs* your race and will have to let you stay. It will have to fight your wars!"

Ranoffga smiled wanly. "True. Earth is, unknowingly, very cooperative. Your own race created the class distinction of Intelligences, Norms and Morons. The resultant, present class and economic systems make the Coins a necessity for all."

"Parasites," Wilson said, looking straight at Ranoffga.

Roden stepped forward, his hands doubled into fists. "Shut up!

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The Sarks have helped Earth, you ungrateful—"

Ranoffga waved a restraining hand.

"Sure they helped Earth," Wilson said. "The same way a tapeworm helps a fat man by sticking to his guts and—"

"Don't feel that way, Mr. Wilson," the Sark pleaded. "We *have* helped your race! We've eliminated crime and war. We've increased the average life span and given Earth a better science. Earth is now much more powerful than it was when we first came and we've only started. In a few years, when we're better organized, we'll raise the standard of living and every Earthman will—"

Wilson interrupted curtly, "Skip it. What happens to me now?"

"We will once more remove your memory. A week later, when it is safe, we will set you at liberty. You will not be harmed in any way."

Roden blurted, "I think we ought to kill him. He's too smart for his own good. He might figure out *again* how—"

Wilson removed the weapon from his tunic and pressed the barrel against his head. "Suppose I kill myself *now?*" he asked. "That would ruin your plans, wouldn't it? My Memo file would be read and everyone would know the truth."

"You won't kill yourself," Ranoffga stated calmly. "You are not the suicide type no matter how great the justification may appear to be. We're psychologically convinced of that—so convinced that we let you keep your little weapon. We knew you wouldn't kill yourself and we thought you could use it to defend yourself from your own group."

Roden slowly crossed the room, his thick arms swinging loosely at his sides. "Are you going to come quietly?" he demanded. "You can't get away this time. We've posted guards all around this room."

Escape was impossible, Wilson knew. Once before he had escaped, but he couldn't remember how, and he had no new ideas.

He shuddered at the thought of losing his memory again—for a full week. A week from now the Sark conspiracy would still be a great invisible parasite clinging vampirishly to an Earth it sought only to use in a cruelly inhuman way. And no one would ever know, simply because he didn't have the nerve to kill himself.

Unless . . .

He pointed the gun at Roden.

The huge man recoiled, and paled visibly.

"Roden, you'll be famous," Wilson said. "You've heard everything that was said here and your Memo file will be talked about for years to come. You'll go down in the history books . . ."

He pressed the trigger. There was an instant, crackling report, followed by a flickering on wall and ceiling.

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Roden's scream ended sharply as his lifeless form struck the floor and rolled over twice.

Ranoffga shrieked and covered his face with his hands. He cried for ten full minutes. It was final, conclusive proof that, as the alien had stated, his race was not familiar with violence.

He recovered eventually, his eyes avoiding the still form on the floor.

"What do you think Earth will do when it knows about us?" he said, in a thin, despairing whisper. "Will they—"

Wilson shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know. They might make your race leave Earth. They might let you stay because, as you've stated, your race has become at least temporarily essential to the stability of our economic and sociological systems. But I'm quite sure no one will continue to drink drugged water, and your sale of Coins is going to dwindle to the vanishing point."

He nodded. "Ranoffga, your race wants to be *needed* because it wants someone to fight its wars. But what you'll never understand is that Earthmen will probably defend your race even when they don't have to. Our race is young and adventurous. We're eager for action and we do like to wave flags and fight for a cause. Any cause will do, just so long as it seems a reasonably good one. We've always looked for *excuses* to fight.

"Frankly, your race is a little crazy and Earthmen are just as crazy, but in a different way. We don't like to see anyone pushed around. Personally, if you gave us ships and weapons as good as the ones your enemies have, I'd be one of the first to fight for you!"

Hope glimmered on the Sark's face.

Wilson walked to a window. On the distant highway, a stream of police cars approached the Reservation, their headlights like bruised eaglets' eyes burning with indignation, the wail of their sirens like the protestations of an angry race.

The Sarks would not struggle or resist. They didn't know how to fight. And, Earth would not be brutal toward the cowardly race. The next few months would be very interesting . . . .

Saturday's child has far to go. But Wednesday's child must follow the Unknown's relentless bidding and its journey—may make the universe reel.

WEDNESDAY'S CHILD

by WILLIAM TENN

In the next issue

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jukebox

by . . . Arthur Sellings

It's a tragic mistake to shun a romantic experience. It may be youth's last desperate dream on a long-forgotten sound track.

He slid off his stool and, taking his drink with him, crossed over to the jukebox. For a moment he regarded the list of tune titles with a dull eye. Then he jabbed his choice, and returned to the bar. But this time he took up a stool next to the redhead he had been watching on and off for the past five minutes. The needle engaged and the music broke out just as he sat down.

The redhead turned vaguely at the sound. He caught her eye.

"My favorite tune," he lied smilingly.

Her eyebrows lifted faintly.

"That trumpet," he said, "that's music, isn't it?"

She gave a disinterested movement of the shoulders and turned away.

What a life! he thought, and found himself suddenly yearning towards domesticity, certainty, monogamy—things he'd always frantically fled from. Freedom, he reflected grayly, was all very well. But freedom for what? To go on playing the small-town Don Juan when you knew you were getting

Not only is Arthur Sellings a subtle and brilliant writer in the realm of whimsical fantasy. He can take a ghost—any kind of ghost—and turn it, him or her into such an amazing byproduct of the scientific mind and method that the most hard-headed skeptic would be brought up short. This is in all respects a true science-fiction yarn. But there is something ghostly about it as well, and if it fails to haunt you unforgettably it can only mean that you have been deliberately led astray by the Watchers from beyond the farthest stars.

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past the appropriate age for it? To make inane small talk, frame the hackneyed gestures of a quite synthetic charm? To be rebuffed—and when you weren't, to find it ending up sordid, expensive, *monotonous?*

He smiled bitterly. That was the word for it, wasn't it? Even marriage couldn't be as monotonous as this life, surely. With the years you could learn new things about a wife. Little, trifling things, perhaps, but they'd be intimate, human. With these chance affairs you only got the surface. And the surfaces were all the same. There must have been changes of style, he told himself, but it was always from one pattern to another, a current model of face and hairdo and phrase, like so many automobiles. Anyway, on retrospect, they all seemed exactly the same—vapid, trite, and completely characterless. He quoted to himself:

When I am formulated—
—sprawling on a pin,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the buttends
of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?

Hell! he thought, how out of character can a man get? It is *I* who am stereotyped, by an act of will—or weakness. I cover the gentle soul of a man of sensibility with a stucco and foreign bravado.

I am an egotist, he told himself, meeting his image in a mirror. He turned away from its look of condemnation. *I am also slightly drunk.*

But his thoughts meandered on. If I am stereotyped, should I wonder that I meet only stereotyped women? Or that I am rebuffed by those of character? He surveyed the back of the redhead with renewed interest.

Her hair was cropped short, but tidily, showing a slender neck of a creaminess that he found quite fascinating. She had on a pink suit. Definitely a woman of character, he told himself. Not for this one the hackneyed green that so many redheads affected. And the way her head was poised was interesting, even if its direction—away from him—*was* discouraging.

I must address myself to her, he thought, with becoming intelligence. I will make a Significant Remark. But the most significant remark he could think up on the spur of the moment was "What'll you have?" But she was still nursing the long drink she'd had when he'd come into the bar. Then—*what?* Ah—

How about the lights, the bronze-colored streaks of fire in the night sky that he had seen on his way here? They had been visible for only a second or two, right overhead, and had then blinked out. A few other people in the street had noticed them. Someone had said, *Flying Saucers,* and others had laughed.

He dismissed the notion with a shrug. What could be more commonplace or boring? Instead, he

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leaned closer to the redhead's back and said, "If you don't like the record I'll be glad to turn it off."

She half-turned, her shoulders eloquent of annoyance.

"Please—" he said. "Don't mind my talking to you. It's just that I'm lonely, you see, and—"

He cursed to find his lips framing old and weary words. But she turned, fully now, a slight smile on her lips.

"In fact," he went on quickly, "I don't like that record at all. It was just something to say, you know how it is."

"Do I?" she said, tilting her head. Then, smiling more certainly, "Perhaps I do. Anyway, I don't like the record, either."

He made to get up to turn it off.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "It's just finishing."

"What kind of music *do* you like?" he asked, turning back.

"Oh," she said, "Vivaldi—"

"Vivaldi?" he said, in a kind of wonder.

"Why, is that something remarkable?" she said.

"No-o. *Yes.* It certainly is," he stuttered, quite confused by meeting a girl in a bar, just like that, who actually liked Vivaldi. A girl, moreover, who was—well, really almost *beautiful.*

Anything can happen now, he thought.

It did.

Total darkness fell upon the world.

He slid off his stool and, taking his drink with him, crossed over to the jukebox. He jabbed his choice, then returned to the bar, next to the redhead. The needle engaged, a trumpet blared out . . .

That tune! Why had he chosen it again? He made to jump up to cut it off. But somehow he couldn't. He just couldn't.

The redhead turned vaguely at the sound. He caught her eye.

I'm sorry, he tried to say. *I didn't want to put it on again. You must believe me—*

"My favorite tune," he said, smiling.

Her eyebrows lifted faintly.

Well, it did bring us together, he tried to apologize. *Perhaps that's why I wanted to hear it again.* But the words refused to come. Instead, he said, "That trumpet. That's music, isn't it?"

He writhed to hear himself repeating the stupid, and by now quite unnecessary words. At least, he would have writhed if he had been able to.

What has happened to me? he thought. Was it all just too good to be true, this miracle of a chance meeting? But it *is* true. It *happened—*

Then why had it stopped? Why was he doing it all over again against his will? Saying things he hadn't the slightest wish to say again, yet at the same time thinking thoughts that he was unable to express?

He felt a reptilian fear creep into his heart as frantic reasoning

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touched a chord from childhood and old stories. What kind of creatures were they that, when they tried to speak, couldn't?

Ghosts—

Then he was a ghost? But, no, he was alive. He was, wasn't he? Anyway, when ghosts couldn't speak the messages they ached to deliver, they *couldn't.* He could *speak.* It was only that he couldn't say the right things, but only repeat words out of an inane and distasteful script. But wait—perhaps . . .

Worth trying, anyway.

He leaned closer to her and said, "If you don't like the record I'll be glad to turn it off."

Having by heaven-knew-what compulsion to speak the words, he couldn't pursue the desperate train of his thoughts. But now, as she turned, smiling slightly, he didn't want to any more. She was smiling, and he was talking to her, and she was listening. And he was in a state of wonder again, not at the curious lapse that had befallen him, but at the sheer miracle of this meeting.

And to the back of his mind now, reassuring him, came the thought that the perfect surprise of it had put him in a whirl for a moment. Yes, of course! It had somehow knocked him into a state of timelessness for a second, so that it was happening for the first time yet seeming as if it had already happened, because it was the kind of meeting he had always dreamed of but had never dared hope to make.

And now he *had* made it. It might be disturbing, this feeling of excitement and strangeness, but was it really anything to wonder at? Wouldn't it be more surprising if he had experienced no excitement at all?

"Well, is that something remarkable?" she said.

"No-o. *Yes.* It certainly is," he found himself saying.

That's right, he remembered, that was when he had first felt confused. It was the strangeness and excitement which must have caused the whirl, the feeling of *dejá vu.* But he didn't feel confused now. Now he was going on. Now *they* were going on. They would talk, this beautiful stranger and himself, of music, of Vivaldi, of—oh, how much more! They would reveal new facets of themselves to each other with every hour together. And there would surely be many hours together. The two of them would—

Darkness fell, sharp and absolute, a darkness of sight and mind together.

HE SLID from his stool . . .

Memory returned. He wanted to scream, but he couldn't. It was starting all over again. What was happening to him? He had to find out, so that he could stop it. Where had he been? Death? ghosthood—ah, yes.

A punishment, was that what it

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was? Had this meeting been conjured up in some back room of the Fates, solely to cheat him? To bring him to the brink of truth after all these years of falsity, only to snatch it away from him again and again?

He laughed hollowly to himself. What nonsense was he thinking? Wasn't such primitive anthropomorphic myth-truckling as stupid as to think himself a ghost? Something fantastic had happened to him, certainly. But to think of being punished by personalized and vindictive Fates was something right out of the archetypal subconscious—the most elemental kind of guilt complex imaginable. Anyway, that, like ghosthood, presupposed his being dead, didn't it? And again, he wasn't—*was he?* He stopped laughing. He had dismissed the thought before, but now it returned to torment him. *Was he? Dead?*

But surely not, he thought. He didn't suffer from a weak heart or anything similar that could bring sudden death. For one wild moment he wondered if this might not be some horrible kind of D.T.'s. But no, he thought, he didn't drink that heavily.

Then—what *had* happened?

A war? But there wasn't a war on. A sudden undeclared attack, then? Could that be it?

But the words he had to say interrupted his thoughts again—the words and the fascination of the girl's face turned to his once more. His hopes rose afresh—only to be dashed again in darkness.

The next time round he told himself, "Yes, that's it. *The lights in the sky.* He had dismissed them as no more than some new kind of jet or something equally commonplace. But perhaps it had been a *hostile* plane and it had dropped a bomb and—

But almost instantly the thought withered and died. *That* still couldn't explain *this.*

Faced with the unknown, the *unknown* unknown, he went on desperately trying to relate it to the familiar, the chronicled unknown. He thought he had succeeded when he decided that it was witchcraft, that this girl, this unlikely girl in an unlikely place, was an agent of darkness.

She *must* be the link in all this, he told himself—its cause or its agent. Two remarkable events like this, the one seemingly wonderful, the other undeniably horrible, couldn't but be connected.

He ached to look into her eyes, to see if he could read the answer there. Perhaps he would see in them a mockery that he had been too enchanted to see before.

But he had to wait until the moment came round again for her to turn, wait what seemed an age while the noise of the trumpet blared insanely from the jukebox.

When she at last turned, a half-smile on her lips, and while he automatically said his lines, he scrutinized her face, her eyes. But

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she was smiling, and he was smiling, and there was no answer at all there . . .

The sixth time round he wondered hysterically if the hateful trumpet playing from the jukebox was, in fact, the Last Trump. But the incongruity of the thought checked the hysteria.

The next time round, though, he reflected that it wasn't so incongruous. Why shouldn't the Last Trump be blown that way? If it was going to sound over a mechanized world why shouldn't *it* be mechanized, too, a million-throated trump set in motion by a million unwitting fingers?

But that, he realized dully, still didn't explain it.

By the ninth time round—or was it the tenth?—he began to understand, or think he did.

As he went through his act he trained his gaze about him. It was hellishly difficult, because his every bodily movement was controlled, even to the eyeballs. But seeing, he discovered, was more and less than optical focus. Noticing was also an ingredient. Within severe limits he found that he could observe things he had been too preoccupied to notice before.

The first thing he managed to discern was that the bar seemed to end in a circle about him. About him and the girl, that was. *And* the jukebox. Then that it was more than a circle. It was a sphere, cutting them off in a tiny universe of their own.

The next time round he tried again. Only this time he strained every nerve to look—outside.

If before it had been difficult, now it was agonizing. For, superimposed upon the incontestability of the force that dictated his actions, was a different quality in what lay beyond—a quality as of entirely different physical laws operating.

But he managed at last to distinguish movement out there. Movement of vast and shadowy shapes, shadowy yet seeming at the same time to shed an aura of somber light. At intervals he saw them bending over the little universe that contained him and the girl. And the truth began to dawn on him.

But frantically he thrust the thought away. He must have proof, he told himself—then tried to thrust that thought away too. As if proof mattered now, when there was nothing he or the girl or anyone else could do about it! But he had to be sure.

Twice round again and he was quite sure. For by then he had had a chance to check the successive dispositions of the dark giants outside. And they weren't the same each time. Once one seemed to bend very close, and something like a cloudy but gently glowing eye seemed to be peering in at them.

And that was proof enough.

Only in here, in this minute segment of his own world, was everything fixed and cyclic. Physically, anyway. His thoughts were independent, even if they couldn't alter

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his movements by the flicker of an eyelash.

So those flashes in the sky *had* meant something. They must have been the visible sign of some visitor to Earth. And they had taken samples—*human* samples. With a little bit of human environment clinging to them, just as a human explorer might bring back from the tropics a strange insect in its nest.

These great dark beings had reached down and scooped them up, and by some superior science had frozen their little charade, so that it repeated itself over and over again. For their pleasure or their study, whichever, it made no difference.

He laughed wryly to himself at the thought of what the dark giants would make of what they saw—a man, a woman, a segment of bar, a jukebox. What construction would they make—what *re*-construction of a social order? Perhaps, though, they had taken other samples. Perhaps from all of them they might be able to piece together a jigsaw picture of Earth's civilization as they studied the samples at their leisure, on board their ship or back on their own world, wherever they were now.

A sudden hopeful thought came to him. Perhaps they were only on probation. Perhaps they had to repeat their little act over and over again so that the giants could be sure that they—the humans—were not dangerous. Perhaps just once more round and they would be satisfied and let him and the girl out from their tantalizing prison. With hope came aching impatience. Then—

"It doesn't matter," she was saying. "It's just finishing."

And in her voice was there not something—?"

"What kind of music *do* you like?" he said.

And it was in his, too.

And then he knew for sure—all of it. And he was filled with a black and hopeless rage. This wasn't just some trick with time, then. If it were he would not only be performing the same acts over and over. His thoughts would surely be the same, too, because it would be fresh each time. But it was only the *physical* actions that had been frozen.

"Oh," she said, "Vivaldi—"

There it was again, more pronounced now and quite unmistakable. There was a small but definite scratchiness in her voice. Her outline, too, seemed to waver ever so slightly at the edges. This was final proof.

Men bring back from remote parts of the world moving pictures of the natives, recordings of their speech. But a superior species would have superior techniques, more complete ones. *Absolutely* complete ones. Not just light and sound, but *everything*.

And now he was filled with a bitter jealousy of his own self back on Earth. The thought of what he and the redhead might have done

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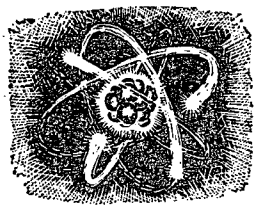
together made him choke with frustration, for now he would never know. Nor would he be able to experience anything of it. He sought consolation in the reflection that whatever *had* happened between them on Earth was probably over and done with long since, the originals of both the redhead and himself skeletons by now—for there was no knowing what interval elapsed during the blacknesses in between the repetitions of their act.

But there was little consolation in the thought. He could have wept at the cruelty of it. Why, he didn't even know her name, would never know it, or anything more about her. They would go on and on, over and over again, looking at each other, talking to each other, as the inane script they had forged for themselves that fated and far-away night on Earth demanded. They would never be closer to each other than that. All they would have would be their thoughts, separate and incommunicable.

He wondered again at that freedom of thought, and cursed it. Perhaps the dark giants didn't even know, when they recorded matter and event, speech and gesture, that a replica of the mind came over with it too, helplessly trapped in the interstices of the recording.

Anyway, there was no way of telling them. He and the redhead were utterly doomed, nothing more now than a recording on some vast celestial jukebox. And there could only be one faint and distant chance of release. That one day, worn out, they might be thrown away onto some vast celestial scrapheap.

He would pray for that day . . . and the long night beyond it.



In a brilliant writer's chill "Utopia" idiots with enlarged heads and wasted bodies chart the destinies of men, and the future's dark unfurling.

THE MINORITY REPORT

By PHILIP K. DICK

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consultant diagnostician

by . . . F. B. Bryning

Joan Buckley could see deep into the minds of desperate, tormented people. But her own problems were unique on the round green Earth.

FEAR . . . Again and again, as his questions approached the subject of fire, there came the blue signal, *Fear.*

Dr. James Ballantine contemplated the small ground-glass panel in the base of his ornate inkstand until the word, in blue letters, flicked out.

"Do you mind?" he asked his patient, a thin, middle-aged spinster, as he took a cigarette case from his pocket.

"No—" she replied, a trifle hesitantly. "No—of course not."

The word *Fear* flashed on and off the tiny screen.

Dr. Ballantine was clumsy with his matches. Somehow, after he had lighted his cigarette, the single match ignited the heads of all the others in the box. There was a fierce, hissing flare . . .

With a cry the patient jumped to her feet, upsetting her chair, to stand before him white and shaken.

Unperturbed by either the burning box of matches or his patient's reaction, the psychiatrist glanced at the screen on which the word *Fear*

We like to think of F. B. Bryning as sitting with his typewriter humming before him—surely an Australian typewriter must be as murmurous as the bee-laden glades of "Down Under" when animated by such story-gathering talents—and writing continuously for hours. The time element is of vital importance, for only then can we be sure that he will continue to delight us with sequels to his amazing atomic age story about the mutant child of Dr. Elizabeth Buckley as entertaining as this—and as super-charged with totally unexpected thrills.

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was flashing on and off rapidly to denote high intensity. As he watched the flashing slowed down and the word remained steady for a few seconds before it disappeared.

Calmly Dr. Ballantine pressed the burning matchbox into his ashtray and smothered the flames. Then he got up, smiling, and went around his desk to pick up his patient's chair.

"Please sit down again, Miss Corbett," he said, reassuringly. "And please forgive my apparent carelessness. I have to confess that that little bit of fireworks was purposely started and under control all the time. There was nothing in it to harm either you or me. It was a trick of mine to help confirm an opinion I have on your problem."

Gingerly, Miss Corbett seated herself again, and he returned to his own chair.

"When was it, Miss Corbett—probably in your childhood—that you had some terrifying experience with fire?"

Back into the screen came the blue word *Fear*.

"I think," he continued, as the patient still hesitated, "that some such experience is at the bottom of your neurosis. Will you please tell me about that time when you nearly lost your life—or you lost something or someone dear to you as a result of fire?"

Her troubled gaze remained upon him, but she did not answer.

"You needn't be afraid of it any longer," he went on persuasively, smiling into her eyes, "you realize now, I'm sure, that it has been creeping along behind you all these years, and you have not dared to look at it. If you turn and face it you will find it will lose its power over you. So please tell me."

Hate, in yellow letters, came up on the screen.

"It is true—what you say," said the patient, tensely. "But I never talk about it."

"Of course not," agreed the psychiatrist. "It can be too painful. As we all do, you prefer to talk of pleasanter things. But that doesn't get rid of it. It gets worse, and begins to hurt of its own accord again. So it must be treated—although the treatment itself may be painful for a time. But eventually the pain will recede, and with it the power of that experience to hurt you. So I must ask you to put up with the pain of bringing it out into the light, where I can face it with you."

Again came the yellow word *Hate* as the patient strove within herself.

"I—I'll tell you," she agreed, with an effort. "It was when I was five years old. My mother . . ."

Dr. Ballantine showed his patient out and returned through the empty waiting room. As he entered his own room again a heavy curtain opposite the door was pulled back, and out stepped a

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girl of striking aspect, in a white medical smock.

She was, in her early twenties, slight and straight, and, it seemed, charged with vitality. Her hair, eyebrows, and lashes were the frosty white, and her skin the delicate pink of the albino which, except for her eyes, she was. Her irises were neither the pink nor the very pale blue typical of the albino, but very dark brown—almost black.

"That was a great help, Joan," said Ballantine, holding for her the chair vacated by the patient. "Once again we got to the heart of a problem in a fraction of the time I would have needed by myself."

She smiled gratefully and spoke a soundless, sibilant "Thank you," as he moved around the desk to his own chair.

"I am more than ever convinced that the ideal employment for your extra-sensory perception is in psychiatry. With that and your already established practice as consulting diagnostician in pathology, you should have a splendid career ahead of you."

The delicate pink of her neck and cheek bloomed a trifle deeper as she uttered again the whispered "Thank you." Yet so precisely were her lip movements made, and so expressive her features, that no one could have had any difficulty in understanding her. She continued in like manner, rather more slowly than normal conversation, clearly rendering her vowel-less pharyngeal speech.

"Glad to help, Uncle Jim." She smiled mischievously. "And your kind words offset my inferiority complex at having no voice."

Ballantine laughed with her. "You haven't much of that complex left, my dear, to talk of it like that."

"I claim the deficiency as an extra qualification for a psychiatrist. It ought to give most patients a feeling of superiority over me—or enlist compassion—so I should get more quickly into sympathetic rapport with them!"

"Good girl! You make me wish I had a wart on my nose, or a squint, for the same purpose. I'm quite sincere."

Head on one side, she gave him an impish, appraising look. "Seems hardly necessary!" she teased, and they grinned companionably at one another. "Now, about Miss Corbett—"

"Before we start," interposed Ballantine. "I was puzzled at your registering *Hate* instead of *Fear* when I asked her about that terrifying experience with fire. Why did she hate me for mentioning that, and forget her fear? Or did you touch the wrong key?"

Dr. Joan Buckley shook her snow-white head.

"Hate it was—but not hate of you. Hate of that particular fire. No doubt she fears fire in general, but because that particular fire maimed and tortured her mother,

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her hate far exceeds her fear when she thinks of it?"

Ballantine pondered for a moment. "You may be right. But how can you be sure it was hatred of fire and not of me, for broaching that very painful subject?"

"Because I, too, experienced hate during those moments. Her feeling was unbelievably intense. With such intensity I have to share the emotion unless I deliberately resist it."

"Does that happen often?"

"With any very strongly-felt emotion—any mass hysteria—yes. But I have learned—from mother mainly, I think—to resist when I want to. But I never have any doubt about the object of the emotion, or what causes it."

When Joan Buckley reached her penthouse home on the roof of the six-story Arthur Buckley Plant Development Institute, she immediately ran to her mother's arms, and clung there.

Dr. Elizabeth Buckley knew just what to do. She embraced her daughter and held her close. As if by a kind of symbiosis, the daughter derived a calmness, a sedation of the nerves, and recuperation. To the mother came a sense of rest also, and a shared exaltation as she felt Joan becoming soothed and eager to assist Dr. Ballantine to an even more remarkable extent.

After twenty-three years of widowhood Elizabeth Buckley was growing old gracefully. Her tall figure was still straight and erect, her hair still more auburn than gray. The few lines on her clear skin were those engraved by the pleasurable effort of concentration upon her chosen work as a scientist, and the satisfaction of achievements beyond the ordinary in creative work. Heightening that satisfaction was the knowledge that she possessed the affection and approbation of her colleagues—and the joy which came to her through sharing the accomplishments of her daughter.

Her grief at the one great catastrophe in her life—the death of her husband, at the height of his career, from exposure to the radioactive forces with which he had been working to develop new plant mutations—had been tempered by three abiding factors.

The first was her deep pride in his achievements and his memory. The second was her own success and self-fulfilment in carrying on his work as Director of the Arthur Buckley Plant Development Institute. The third was her signal victory in her gamble with life in bearing her husband's mutant child—the sepia-eyed, albinoid, and voiceless daughter who yet possessed, in addition to an intelligence worthy of her parents, a singular telepathic sense.

Elizabeth Buckley's devotion to the task of caring for and training her peculiarly handicapped yet uniquely gifted daughter had been all-absorbing. It had meant much physical isolation for them both,

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to shield the too-receptive child from random contacts which might have led to mental and emotional derangement.

It had meant painstaking study of the processes of speech and much patient labor to teach the baby girl to speak normally in all but vocalized vowel sounds. This the child had learned to do with conspicuous success, almost entirely offsetting her lack of vocal cords.

It had meant for Elizabeth Buckley herself the development of an exceptionally high degree of self-control in all things, so that her moments of fear, worry, anxiety, anger, or high excitement would not be unbalancing to the infant telepath.

She had had to train herself to be ready for the frequent occasions when the child, jittery from her "reception" of some nerve-jangling contact, would run to her arms as a refuge. There she would cling, enveloped in an "aura," as it were, of comforting, warm affection, of calm confidence, and strength.

Elizabeth Buckley had found that this physical and emotional embrace, which had been initiated by the child herself in the first few hours of her life, with her head pressed into her mother's bosom, had the effect of discharging Joan's overwrought emotions, and of restoring her mental and emotional vigor.

And she had found that even in a crowded room, when physical isolation was impossible the child could be substantially "insulated" from the babel of emotional impulses surrounding her in just this way.

When the white head was lifted from her breast and laid on her shoulder, Elizabeth Buckley stroked Joan's silken hair.

"A trying day, dear?" she asked.

"A good day, really, Mother." Joan sat up so that her lips could be read. "We made progress on all our cases."

"You seem more tired than usual."

"Perhaps. Of course I have to suffer with each patient to some extent. I know now how to sample their sensations, and resist them before I get too much. But a full day of it is a bit wearing."

"Would it help, do you think, if you limited more strictly the number of patients you monitor in a day—or how involved you become emotionally with each individual case?"

Joan Buckley shrugged. "Perhaps I need just to hold on—and increase my capacity to resist," she said. "I haven't been overwhelmed by anyone else's emotions in a long time. I think it may be very much like the weariness of aching muscles growing stronger with exercise."

"I hope so. No doubt you can judge best, darling. But be sure to take care."

"I shall, Mother. Tonight I'm

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going to bed early. In the morning Uncle Jim is taking me to see a patient at Broadacres Mental Hospital before city consultations."

Elizabeth Buckley nodded. "Will you invite him to have dinner with us tomorrow evening?" she said. "I've a few questions I'd like to ask him."

"Oh, Mother! You shouldn't fuss over me like that. I'm old enough now—"

"Of course you are!" Dr. Elizabeth Buckley smiled fondly. "And a Doctor of Medicine to boot. But I want to talk to him all the same."

"THIS patient," explained Dr. Ballantine as they were driven towards Broadacres next morning, "has us baffled for the time being. His name is George Rogers and he is about thirty-five years old. He appears to be a more or less typical paranoid—with a pronounced persecution complex, delusions of grandeur, and a readiness to score off anyone in an 'inferior' situation to himself, such as the weaker and more timid patients. He parades a lofty contempt for the hospital attendants, whom he treats as menials, and so on."

"Any—violence?" Joan asked.

"Rarely," replied Ballantine, frowning. "He will occasionally take advantage of a turned back to get in a furtive punch or a kick. And he keeps a sharp eye out for opportunities of escape. At times you would think him a case of reaction against a tyrannical father—transferring the father-hatred to every other man in authority over him for the time being—policemen, employer, doctor, and so on. He adopts this attitude in particular towards his doctors, who are Dr. Wilson, Superintendent of Broadacres, and, in consultation, myself."

"So I, who am not a man, might—?" Joan let the question trail off.

"Perhaps," agreed Ballantine. "But I really had in mind your working unseen behind a screen in Dr. Wilson's room, and noting his reactions in shorthand. We don't want to bring him to my rooms yet, and our electrical signaling screen is a bit too cumbersome to uproot and rig up here. We must, by the way, get a portable outfit before long."

"You know best about that," said Joan. "But what is the precise difficulty? Where does the 'typical paranoid' diagnosis break down?"

"It doesn't, really. It's just that we can't get past the main hurdle in order to begin therapy. We are more and more certain that father-hatred is at the bottom of his troubles, because whenever his father is mentioned he becomes intensely angry. He quivers with rage and shouts 'Don't *mention* my father! How dare you speak of my father!' And he becomes so agitated that we can't get any further."

"And you'd like me to be present when he does that again?"

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"Yes. Everything seems to go up at that point in an uncontrollable fury that renders him blanched and shaking, with eyes flaming fiercely . . . I have told Dr. Wilson what you can do and I am just hoping you can sense in that outburst of his something that will give us the clue we need."

Right from the beginning, however, the doctor's little scheme went astray. Joan had just been introduced to Dr. Wilson in his office when a not-too-experienced attendant brought the patient straight in, through a door in the wall behind the superintendent, instead of asking him to wait in the anteroom.

In his exasperation as he swung about, Dr. Wilson knocked from his desk a round phial of tablets, which clattered to the floor and rolled beneath a cabinet. As he rose to his feet the apologetic attendant promptly went down on his hands and knees to grope for the small, and possibly shattered, container.

Joan had already begun covertly to study the patient. He was thin and tense, barely above medium height, with a good head of unruly hair and bushy black eyebrows. He had a lean, bony, toothy countenance, with a wide, mobile mouth which, as she watched, he pursed forward and then drew back over his strong teeth.

She heard Dr. Wilson speaking to the attendant, but his words failed to register with her as she suddenly sensed the patient's scorn, which was quickly overwhelmed by something else—a wild delight, with an abandoned, reckless element in it.

Letting herself go with it she found herself regarding the round metal ruler on Dr. Wilson's desk with a peculiar fascination. She felt a sudden desire to snatch it up and hit the attendant on the head with it. Simultaneously she saw the patient's right hand moving towards the desk.

She stood up and reached quickly for the ruler.

She was too late. Rogers had picked it up, and was fingering it. Quickly she moved around the desk, between Rogers and the attendant. Pushing Dr. Ballantine aside rather ungently she wheeled and confronted the patient with her most dazzling smile.

"Thank you!" she exclaimed in her loudest whisper and most expressive lip-talk, taking firm hold of the ruler. "That's the very thing!"

She felt the tug on the ruler as Rogers momentarily held to his original purpose, despite his surprise. Then he hesitated, intrigued by her dramatic mode of speech and her peculiar, attractive appearance. For a split second he glanced at his intended victim, sensed that his moment had passed, and yielded the ruler to Joan's importunate hand.

Swinging about, Joan at once passed the ruler to Dr. Wilson.

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"This will help him reach it," she said, and at the same time, unseen by Rogers, motioned Dr. Ballantine to keep away. Then she turned back to Rogers with another flashing smile. "I hope you don't think I was rude! You see—I have no voice and I often do things instead of talking. I forget that other people think and act at the same time, too!"

Still a trifle bewildered at the speed with which events had moved, but fascinated by Joan's vivacity, the patient shook his head.

"No—oh, no—you weren't rude," he faltered. "Not a bit. I was going to—to give it to him. But you were nearer. And you thought of it, too."

"How nice of you to say that!" She beamed at him, and noticed with relief that Dr. Ballantine had restrained Dr. Wilson from interrupting. "I'm sure you acted first. But you are kind to give me credit. You see, having no voice makes me feel inferior—"

"Oh, no," he protested. "You have no reason—"

"I have to assert myself at times, they tell me, to overcome that feeling of inferiority."

Joan felt shameless as she sensed a warm, protective feeling towards herself build up in him, and she knew she could manage him from that moment. She signaled behind her back to Dr. Ballantine to leave the room.

"They're mad," said the patient, confidentially. She felt a sudden surge of anger in him. "Why did they bring you here?"

"I am visiting Dr. Wilson—with Dr. Ballantine—for a consultation."

She sensed his anger give way to scorn, and heard with approval Dr. Ballantine say: "Come into the ante-room, Wilson, and tell me about it. Miss Buckley and Mr. Rogers can wait here for us."

"They're all quacks," Rogers said when they had gone. "Jailers! Look out they don't try to shut you up here with the rest of us."

"I couldn't say what they have in mind," she confessed.

"I know them! They're probably plotting out there right now, planning to trick you into admitting things that aren't true. Don't you get sick of their endless questions?"

Joan grimaced and he interpreted it as a *moue* of disgust.

"But I'm too smart for this fellow Wilson," he said, triumphantly. "I know his kind! My stepfather was one just like him! He tried to take the rightful place of my father! He even made me change my name to his." A resentful gleam came into his eyes.

"Isn't Rogers your real name?" Joan asked, wide-eyed.

"My real name," he confided in a lowered voice, "is Stephenson—George Stephenson. It's the same name as that of the man who invented the steam locomotive. A great man! That was my father's

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name, too. There was no one like my father. He died when I was seven."

"I am sure *you* are like him," suggested Joan.

"You think so?" he cried eagerly. "I am, of course! Yes—I am, really. And he was too smart for his enemies, too. They were all down on him. But he was too good for them. If he'd lived, he'd have beaten them all. He was afraid of nothing."

Fifteen minutes later Dr. Joan Buckley sat again with Dr. Wilson and Dr. Ballantine in the former's office.

"Do you think you might be a step forward if you knew that your patient's persecution complex originated with a stepfather—not his real father?" she asked them.

Dr. Wilson's eyebrows shot up. "I think we might be," he agreed.

"And what if he really worshipped his real father, who was a great companion, but died when he was seven? And if his real father was usurped by the stepfather who turned out to be a harsh disciplinarian?"

The two men exchanged glances, Wilson with eyebrows again high on his forehead, Ballantine rather smug.

"And what if the stepfather, jealous, perhaps, of the real father, insisted on expunging his memory by having the boy change his name from George Stephenson—his father's name and an honored name in history—to George Rogers?"

Joan and Ballantine waited for Dr. Wilson to speak.

"I should think," said Wilson after a few moments, "that if all that should be true it will give us the key—and I'd say in addition that we can turn that key. But how you came to know all this, young lady, is beyond me!"

"I told you, Wilson, that Dr. Buckley could get us the answers if anyone could—and that she works fast," claimed Ballantine. "But this time she seems to have done the job before we even got started." He leaned over and patted Joan on the hand. "Thank you, my dear."

IN HER rooftop garden, in the light that streamed out from the lounge, Elizabeth Buckley and Dr. Ballantine took their coffee. Joan had long since gone to bed at the farthest corner of the house.

"Of course I am pleased—and proud—Jim, at such high praise of Joan," she said. "And I admit she is as uniquely fitted to work in psychiatry as she is in the diagnosis of the disorders of inarticulate infants. But what is to be the effect on her of such 'tuning-in,' and really sharing *as experiences* the emotional storms and mental aberrations of people who are—well—mentally ill?"

Ballantine jabbed at the disc of lemon in his cup.

"Frankly, Elizabeth, I don't know. I have not forgotten our speculations on this matter when

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Joan decided to add psychiatry to her medical degree, and again when she entered my rooms as associate. I have limited her contacts to a selected number of patients. She seems never to be jittery after monitoring any patient. A bit weary, perhaps, at the end of the day—sometimes a trifle pale."

"It worries me that she cannot be so detached—as, for example, you can be," explained Elizabeth Buckley. "Surely you must get 'fed-up' sometimes at confronting psychological aberrations day after day? But Joan not merely confronts them. She actually shares their tensions and turmoils. It *must* have some effect."

"I agree." He nodded slowly. "Certainly she should be restricted in the number of her contacts."

"I referred to that last night, when I thought she came home rather tired. She had other ideas."

"Oh?" Dr. Ballantine exclaimed, his expression thoughtful.

"She suggested that probably she was merely suffering from 'aching muscles' while developing strength," Elizabeth Buckley said. "If she just 'held on,' she thought, she would increase her ability to resist."

"She did?" For a moment Ballantine pondered the statement. "She might well be right, although we won't take it for granted," he said, at last. "She should have enough strength of will. I doubt if either you or her father lacked anything in that direction! And we mustn't forget that from babyhood Joan has been contending with an emotional clamor emanating from everyone around her.

"We shielded her from it when she was little—and we still try to. But nothing could have avoided the need for her to build her own armor against it. She has probably developed some such shield long since, and now it may be only a matter of toughening it."

"In any case it might be important to protect her from too great a battering before she has that armor really strong?"

"I'll keep an eye on that. But I suspect she has probably diagnosed her own case this time as shrewdly as she has her inevitable complexes arising from never having had a voice—or a father."

"Has she—really?"

"Long since," replied Ballantine, with quiet assurance, "and prescribed the best possible remedies, obtainable or not."

"What were they. Tell me!"

Ballantine put his cup down and they walked over to the parapet. Resting his elbows on the top of the wall, he looked away from her across the Institute's farmlands and the river, to the distant lights of the city.

"To get a voice—and to get a husband."

The light went out of Elizabeth Buckley's eyes, and she seemed to droop a little against the wall.

"Poor darling!"

"She doesn't think so. When she

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told me I felt very much as you do now, inside. But I said, as brightly as I could, 'You're a good psychiatrist, Joan—' She cut me off. 'Don't feel sorry for me, Uncle Jim. Your words can't hide from me what you're feeling, you know. I think I'll have them both before I die.' "

"But marriage—"

"Of the two that would be the easier obtained. She's very attractive—and not without suitors now."

"But she's a mutant!"

"Does that matter—in these days?"

"Of course she doesn't *have* to have children," acknowledged Elizabeth Buckley. "She doesn't *have* to pass on the afflictions of the parents unto the fourth generation and beyond."

"But what of the gifts—the special qualities? What of her extrasensory perception—if that can be inherited?" Dr. Ballantine asked. "She may feel the same compulsion that you felt when you decided to bear her although you knew she must almost certainly be mutated in some way."

"The same gamble," amended Elizabeth Buckley. "And at such long odds we couldn't expect to win a second time."

"Do you really mean that 'we' Elizabeth? Shouldn't it be 'they'—Joan and her husband? It will be a first time for them, with odds no worse than yours."

For quite half a minute Elizabeth Buckley said nothing. Then she turned and smiled.

"You are quite right, of course, Jim. It's just that I have to get used to the idea. Joan will always need someone to turn to—as to a haven. Someone intimate, and I won't be here always. Still, the right kind of husband might be hard to find."

"According to Joan she will find a man like her father."

Elizabeth Buckley wheeled on him. "How can she? She never even saw her father. He died seven months before she was born!"

"She claims to know him well."

"What do you mean?" Dr. Buckley asked.

"On the same occasion when she told me she would have a husband some day she also said: 'I have always known my father, Uncle Jim—through my mother!' "

Like a statue Elizabeth Buckley stood, holding tightly to the parapet. When she relaxed she placed a hand on Ballantine's arm. With relief, he saw that she was smiling.

"Once again she is away ahead of me, Jim. I must learn to admit that my little daughter is grownup now."

"And," added Ballantine, "that she is in some ways specially well equipped to take care of herself."

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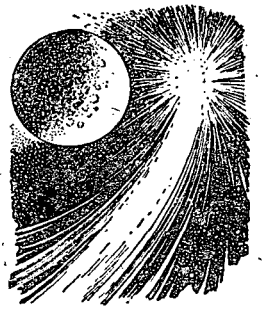

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picture that!

by . . . Norman Arkawy

It was a wonderful town—friendly and joyous. But when Louis turned photographer's helper the future did an eerily startling take!

WHEN I FIRST met Uncle Willie, I was an itinerant tramp who had just arrived in Hallow. I was just passing through, and I had no idea, at the time, that with the help of a wonderful camera, I was going to be instrumental in bringing happiness to him. I had no idea that I was going to find happiness myself. All I wanted was a handout.

WILL FARR, said the sign on the plateglass store front, PHOTOGRAPHER. This is a likely prospect, I thought. I could think of nothing that I could do for a photographer, and, satisfied that it was safe to ask for work, I turned in off the sidewalk and entered the studio.

It was a small room, almost bare of furnishings. I am an observant individual and I noticed that twenty-eight small photographs hung in three neat rows on the wall facing the door. They were a poor advertisement for the skill of the photographer who had taken them. Excessive grain and unsightly pock marks obscured the salient aspects of most of them. Several others

Norman Arkawy is one of the younger group of science fantasy writers who have made such determined forays into the field in recent years with the avowed intention of transforming it. Some have succeeded; some have failed. But Mr. Arkawy's success has been more than confirmed by the frequency of his appearance in all of the leading SF magazines. In this rarely imaginative little story dewdrops of the future glisten with a most persuasive convincingness on a friendly village photographer's audaciously exposed negatives.

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were streaked with yellow and blue fogs. Only the last two pictures at the end of the bottom row were fairly good, and those two were almost identical uninspired prints of a dead tree.

"Some photographer!" I thought. "If he's in this business to make a living he's probably so broke he'll try to put the bite on me!"

I was turning to leave and seek out more promising prospects when a curtain in the back of the store parted and Uncle Willie came into the room. "Good morning," he said, smiling at me as if I were a paying customer. "Can I help you?"

I sized him up quickly and decided to use the direct approach. "Yes, sir," I said, "I haven't had anything to eat today and I could sure use some help."

"Well, sir," said Uncle Willie without batting an eye, "I was just fixing to close up for lunch. Be glad to have your company."

I'm almost never wrong in sizing folks up. I had figured Uncle Willie for a real sweet guy, and he was. He closed the shop, and we went down the street to the restaurant.

"I hope my appearance won't embarrass you," I said, conscious of my shabby clothes and unshaven chin. "Perhaps I'd better go around to . . ."

He laughed. "Folks hereabouts don't put no stock in what a man wears," he said. "We figure if he wants to wear old clothes, that's his business. If he's got to wear 'em, we figure give him time and maybe his luck will change and he'll buy some new duds here in Hallow." He chuckled again, and added: "And give business a boost."

I followed him into the restaurant, to a table near the window. "If we're going to eat together, we ought to get to know one another," he said, extending his hand. "I'm Will Farr."

I told him my name, the real one, which I hadn't used in over three years. For the first time since I hit the road, I seemed to have enough self-respect to call myself Louis Webster. "Footloose Looie" did not seem to fit me any more.

"Pleased to know you, Mr. Webster," Uncle Willie said. "Mind if I call you Louis? I don't see no need for a man having two names when one will do."

I smiled at him. "Fair enough, Will."

"Might as well make it Uncle Willie," he said. "If you're aiming to stay in town a while, that's what you'll be calling me sooner or later. Everybody does."

We ate lunch, then went back to Uncle Willie's studio. It was during the meal that I decided that I would like to settle down in Hallow. I had never dreamed of finding a place where people did not take a man at face value, but accepted him as an equal, regardless of his appearance. I had stopped hoping that I would ever be given

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the opportunity to regain my self-respect. Now, here it was: the place and the opportunity, and I was determined to take both if they were offered to me.

"Are there any jobs to be had in this town?" I asked.

"Sure," said Uncle Willie. "As a matter of fact, I could use an assistant myself. I'm pretty busy, you know."

I laughed. "Busy? A photographer in a small town like this? Thanks for the offer, Will, but I don't want charity." It's remarkable what a little self-respect can do to a man!

His eyebrows lifted in mild reproach. "I'm not offering you a handout," he said. "I really am busy. There's not much regular photographic work to be done," he explained, "but my experiments keep me busy most of the time, and I could use someone to help me with them."

Now *my* eyebrows lifted. "Experiments?"

He waved a hand at the pictures lined up on the wall. "You must have noticed these."

"Yes," I said. "They're—well, they're certainly different."

He laughed in his friendly, honest way. "You mean they're no good." I started to protest that I had not meant that at all, but he brushed aside my objection. "You're right, of course. As photographs, they're terrible. But as the results of my experiments, I think they're pretty good."

I went over to the pictures and studied them. I could see nothing good about them. Grainy, pock-marked, streaked, they were all unintelligible except for the last two, which were the mediocre still takes of a dead tree.

"Those pictures," Uncle Willie went on, "are step by step records of the improvements in my technique. The last one is pretty good, I think."

"Quite good," I lied politely.

Uncle Willie smiled smugly. "You'd really mean that if you knew what that picture represents."

"What do you mean?" I asked. "It's a tree. I can see that."

"I want to show you something," he said, beckoning me to follow him outside. He pointed to a sturdy young maple tree in front of his shop. "That's the tree in the picture," he announced quietly.

"I don't understand," I confessed.

"I think I've developed a camera that takes pictures of the future," he said with an undercurrent of excitement in his voice. "I don't know how it works," he admitted, "but when I used it to take a picture of that tree, it gave me the photograph you saw hanging on the wall in there."

"You've got a camera that . . .?" The idea seemed too fantastic to put into words.

He nodded his head. "The funny thing is, I didn't even know what I was doing when I made it. I was

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trying to make a camera that would take three-D pictures you could look at without any stereo devices, and I stumbled onto this instead.

"At first, the pictures were impossible to read. So I kept on tinkering with the lens arrangement in the camera, until they finally came out clear. They're not in three-D, but they're not ordinary photographs, either. They're *time* pictures! I was as sure of it then as I am now."

I stared at him, unable to believe what I was hearing. *Poor Uncle Willie,* I thought—*and he seems like such a nice guy!*

"Of course," he continued, "it needs a lot of work yet. I haven't tried it out on anything but that tree, and I'm not even sure that it looks into the future. There might have been a dead tree standing there in the past, you know. Maybe the camera looks back in time instead of ahead. But one thing I do know: it doesn't show things as they are now. That tree isn't dead!"

"No, it isn't," I agreed half-heartedly.

"Oh, I'll have to fool around with it a lot more before I'll have it perfected, I guess. The first thing I've got to do is take pictures of other things to see which way it moves them in time. If old Mrs. Beardsley comes out a kid, it looks into the past. If Timmy Crew looks like an old man, it looks into the future. If—"

"Well, why don't you?" I asked. "Why don't you just go out and take some pictures?"

"It's not that easy," he said. "I have to make my own film, and that takes time and a lot of work. That's why I could use your help, if you want a job. I can't pay much, but . . ."

"It's a deal!" I said. *What the heck,* I thought, *even if the little guy is eccentric, he's a good joe.* And I still liked the looks of Hallow as a place to settle down. So, I decided I'd help Uncle Willie with his crazy experiments and, at the same time, try Hallow on for size.

So I went to work in Uncle Willie's laboratory, making film for his camera. He had three specially developed emulsions with which he coated three thin glass plates. He sandwiched the three plates and fused them along two edges to form one film plate. It was a slow and tedious process. Working together, we had only fifteen plates finished by the end of the week.

During that week, I got the low-down on a lot of things. For one, Uncle Willie was an even sweeter guy than I had thought. He loved children, and thought of grown-ups as children who were just a little older than they had been at one time. It was a pity, everyone said, that he had never married and had kids of his own. That was the tragedy of Hallow, to hear people talk—the simple fact that Will Farr had remained a bachelor. He

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would have made a wonderful father, they said.

But his youth had passed, and now his bachelorhood was deep-grained and solidly established. The town busybodies had not given up on him, though. In their good-intentioned, bungling way, they were still trying to pair him off with the eligible mature and unmarried women in Hallow. Conspicuous among the prospects were the unpleasingly plump widow who was the leader of the Women's Club, the withered old maid librarian whom everybody pitied and nobody loved, and—Miss Barnes.

Actually, Miss Barnes was the only prospect that anyone but a meddling busybody would have seriously considered. She was a female counterpart of Uncle Willie—a little younger perhaps, and a bit prettier—and folks would have called her Aunt Mary except that she was a schoolteacher and the kids just naturally referred to her as "Miss Barnes."

They would have been happy together, everybody said. But Uncle Willie just never got around to asking Mary Barnes to marry him. He loved her, but he was plagued by shyness and a feeling of inferiority, and he was sure that Mary felt only a condescending fondness for him. Everybody else in town had it figured out the other way around, for it was obvious that Mary's feelings exceeded fondness. But Willie seemed indifferent.

I decided somebody should have a talk with Mary and, since I was the only one who knew Will's secret, I promised myself that I would explain how matters stood just as soon as we became so well acquainted that she wouldn't think I was a fun-making wise guy.

On Friday, Willie and I went out, loaded down with camera, tripod and a heavy case of film plates. We walked around town, taking shots of various people and things. We used up two-thirds of our supply of film before Willie's curiosity persuaded him that we had a sufficiently large and varied sampling to tell us what we wanted to know. Then with methodical assurance we packed up and hurried back to the studio to develop the plates.

We took the negatives out of the fixer bath and held them up to the viewbox, examined them one by one. I looked at Uncle Willie in amazement. He was not so eccentric after all. His camera really worked!

The results of the ten shots we'd taken were more confusing than clarifying, however. They seemed to picture different haphazard movements in time.

Picture number one was a candid shot of Mrs. Beardsley, the leader of Hallow Society. A woman of stout middle-age, the photograph showed her as a young and strikingly beautiful girl.

Picture number two showed Charlie Morrin's hardware store with a shiny new modern front.

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Picture number three should have been a walking likeness of little Timmy Crew. It came out an action take of a grown-up Tim Crew —a baseball player taking a hefty swing at bat.

Picture number four was a blank. It had been a shot of Old Man Jensen, who, folks said, drank too much and who, I recalled, had been bemused by a hangover when we saw him.

Picture number five was a take of me. It showed me as I am; a little sturdier in build, perhaps.

Uncle Willie shook his head in bewilderment. "It doesn't make sense," he said. "It just doesn't make any sense at all!"

I looked over the first five pictures again and began, vaguely, to see a possible meaning in the confusion.

"Mrs. Beardsley gets young," Uncle Willie expounded. "That's a movement into the past. Charlie's store becomes modernized—a movement into the future. Timmy grows up—the future again. One shot doesn't come out at all. And you're just you, as you are today. I can't figure it out," he said, "unless it's just a hit or miss proposition . . . unless the camera's completely erratic!"

"Let's see the rest of them," I said, anxious to follow up my hunch. He held the negatives up for examination.

Picture number six was the statue of General Grant in front of the Town Hall. It was an ordinary picture of the statue of General Grant. Pictures number seven, eight and nine were distorted views of Town Hall, the schoolhouse, and the post office.

Picture number ten was an embarrassing shot of Miss Barnes. She had no clothing on and was held in a passionate embrace by a man who was a dead ringer for Uncle Willie.

"It figures," I said, convinced that my hunch had been right, and understanding the nature of Uncle Willie's marvelous camera. "Here, Will." I handed him the last negative. "What do you have to say for yourself?"

He blushed crimson.

"Did that happen in the past?" I asked, smiling.

"Of course not!" he spluttered, growing even redder.

"Then it must be going to happen in the future, right?"

"I . . . I guess so."

I laughed at his discomfort. "Well, I suppose I could let it go at that," I said. "Maybe if you thought it was inevitable, you'd do something to make it happen soon. On the other hand, you might just sit back and wait for it to happen, in which case it never would. Y'see," I told him, "your camera doesn't take pictures of the future *or* the past. It doesn't move in time at all. It moves in an entirely different dimension."

"Different dimension?" Uncle Willie was obviously baffled. He looked at me in the same way I

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must have looked at him when he first told me of his camera. "What dimension?"

"Hope," I said. "It shows what people wish for, what they'd like to be true. Mrs. Beardsley would like to be a young girl again, and prettier than she could possibly ever have been. Your camera shows her that way. Charlie would like to fix his store up with a new front," I went on, checking off each picture. "Timmy wants to be a big league baseball player. Old Man Jensen, with his hangover, was probably wishing he had never been born, so his picture came out a blank."

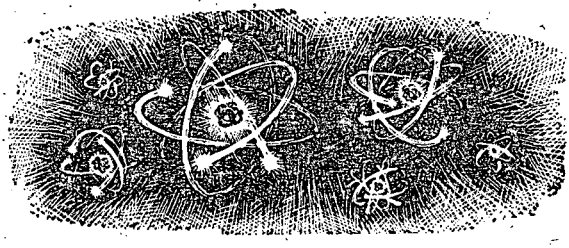
"Wait a minute," Uncle Willie objected. "What about you, and the statue, and the tree, and . . .?"

"Easy," I explained. "I came out almost exactly the way I am now because I don't want anything different than what I've got. The statue of Grant is inanimate, so there's no wish involved there. The picture of the tree was probably the collective wish of all the termites on it. The buildings appear distorted because there were many conflicting wishes coming, all at the same time, from the people inside them. Which brings us to Miss Barnes . . ."

But Uncle Willie wasn't listening to me any more. I guess I had convinced him, because he was already out the door, heading down the street towards Miss Barnes' place.

I smiled and congratulated myself on not having to have that delicate talk with Mary Barnes, after all. I looked down at Willie's camera. A wonderful invention, I thought. With it, a man can see his dreams come true. But I didn't need it.

I closed the shop and strolled through the streets of Hallow, nodding happy hellos to the friendly, smiling faces of the people who called me Louis and who were not ashamed to call me friend. No, I did not need the camera. My dream had already come true. And not just on paper.



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floyd and the eumenides

by . . . Evelyn E. Smith

A man pursued by the Furies may be irresistible to the ladies. But there's a dreadful catch to it—as Floyd Smathers discovered.

WHEN FLOYD SMATHERS came back from his four-week, all-expenses-paid cruise to Greece and the Mediterranean Islands pursued by the Furies, he was asked nearly everywhere. The expenses had all been paid by the Acropolis Dried Fig Company, for which he had completed the sentence "I like Acropolis Dried Figs because . . ." in less than twenty-five words.

Upen hearing of the young man's good fortune, Mr. Levjoy owner and director of the Levjoy Advertising Agency, for which Floyd worked as junior copywriter, had given him all the time in the world to make his trip.

"For," he said, "if you can turn out prize-winning sentences for Acropolis and such unmitigated trash for us, then it is plain to see your heart is not with Levjoy." Meaning the agency and not himself, for he was not a sentimental man during business hours.

He had been right, of course. Floyd, fundamentally an honest young man, was able to write glowingly about Acropolis Dried Figs

Evelyn E. Smith has a rarely evocative gift for summoning the most illustrious of mythological characters from shades Elysium, and endowing them with twentieth-century foibles. But what writer before her in fantasy's dark-bright domain has ever dared to evoke the Furies, *those serpent-tressed sisters of Greek mythology in all of their Gorgonesque frightfulness? Yet Miss Smith has appeared so often in these pages with a wand of gold plucked straight from Merlin's hand that her audacity ought not to have surprised us.*

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because he truly loved them, finding them as tasty, nutritious, and healthful as he had stated in his less than twenty-five words, whereas he could find nothing admirable in any of the products sponsored by Mr. Levjoy's firm.

Being out of a job did not depress Floyd, for he had been fired many times before in his twenty-seven years. Buoyed by the knowledge that six months worth of unemployment insurance awaited him upon his return, he embarked for the land of the Hellenes, blithe as a young man of a naturally melancholy disposition could be.

The trip itself was not an unqualified success. Floyd was a shy and retiring youth, devoid of the charm, good looks, money, or any of the other attributes that win friends. Orphaned since youth, he was accustomed to loneliness and had never succeeded in making the requisite social adjustments. Upon a tourist-class ship, he might have managed to find others like himself.

But unfortunately, Acropolis Dried Figs did not believe in doing things by halves, and he, therefore, found himself the occupant of a spacious first-class cabin on a luxury liner. The other passengers all were, or believed themselves to be, members of the *haut monde*. They accepted Floyd's own opinion of himself—which was nil—at face value, and sneered at him or ignored him as the occasion arose.

Floyd dreamed many dreams of defiance, all of which he lacked the courage to carry out. Particularly did he wish to defy the lovely Veronica Van Brunt, whose disdain he felt most keenly because it seemed unfair of her to begrudge him in person the smiles her two-dimensional counterpart had accorded him so freely, or, to be precise, for the sum of seventy cents on weekday nights, eighty-five on Saturdays. As soon as the sea began to swell, however, he found himself fully preoccupied with visceral disorders far overshadowing those of the heart or his self-esteem.

His seasickness lasted until just before the S. S. *Nereus* touched land. Greece he enjoyed despite its lack of sanitation, not only for its beauty but because to the simple Greek peasants all Americans were millionaires, and they smiled at him and cheated him with the same warmth that they smiled at and cheated his fellow passengers, some of whom actually *were* millionaires.

And, since on the tours the others persisted in their haughty behavior toward him Floyd took to wandering off by himself, rejoining them only for meals, and, toward the end, not even then.

The last day the ship was in port, Miss Van Brunt and Anthony, sixth Baron Threadgill, were sipping gin and lime on the boat-deck when they espied a small commotion at the pier entrance and Floyd Smathers burst into sight, pursued by three shrieking, snaky-haired hags in classical Greek costume.

"The fellow must've tried to

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smuggle something past the customs," Threadgill remarked, leaning over the side of the ship and regarding the tableau with interest.

"I really don't think so, Tony," Miss Van Brunt said. The customs men don't dress like that. These must be peasants—probably the wretched little man tried to cheat them or flirt with them or something. But let's not bother with him, Tony. Let's talk about us . . ." And she turned her great blue eyes effectively upon the young man.

Although Miss Van Brunt's long and distinguished roster of husbands included several titles—she was a social luminary as well as an actress—none had been English, and she was curious to know what it would be like to be married to a British nobleman.

Floyd, however, could not dismiss his problem so lightly. His stateroom had seemed large on the way out, but now, filled by three vociferous Furies, it was tiny.

"You'll have to leave, you know," he told them. "I can't afford to pay three more fares, even if I wanted to, which I don't."

"We shall never leave you," declared Alecto. Being supernatural, the three sisters were, of course, conversant with all languages. "We shall hound you to the end of your days . . . There, doesn't that make you writhe in agony?"

Straightway, with her invisible stings, she inflicted on him the selfsame torments that had caused Orestes to shriek through innumerable strophes and antistrophes.

But Floyd merely gave his usual twisted smile. "I have always had poor teeth," he said. "In your day I don't suppose you had such a thing as dentists. But, let me tell you, my Dr. Frankenstein could give you ladies cards and spades in the matter of torture."

"What are dentists?" Megaera asked, jealously.

"They are creatures besides which your primitive efforts at inflicting agony are as nothing," he told her, falling naturally into the heroic diction suitable for a man in his plight.

At this the two Furies gnashed their teeth and went at him with redoubled vigor, while chanting an appropriate passage from Æschylus: "'. . . swift as the wind,/We follow and find,/Till he stumbles apace,/Who had hoped in the race,/To escape from the grasp of the Furies,/And we trample him low/Till he writhes in his woe,/Who had fled from the chase of the Furies.'"

But Floyd continued to unpack. "I don't pretend that you're not going to be an inconvenience," he told them over his shoulder as he placed his shirts neatly in a drawer, "because you are. But that's all."

"Where's Tisiphone!" Alecto suddenly screamed. "No wonder we haven't been able to achieve the full effect! Tisiphone!"

"I'm in here!" the third Fury's voice came from the bathroom. "Look, you just turn these little

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handles and water comes out. Zeus never could do anything like this—at least not without a lot of fuss."

"Come out of there and do your work!" Alecto yelled.

"Oh, very well."

The youngest Fury emerged from the bathroom just as a bell rang outside and a stentorian voice bellowed, "All ashore that's going ashore."

"Beg pardon, sir—" a steward knocked on the half-open door "—but it's time for the ladies to go."

"You tell them," Floyd suggested, separating the socks with holes from the socks with integrity. "They refuse to leave."

The steward looked apologetically at the Furies. "I'm sorry, ladies, but all visitors must leave the ship."

"We are not visitors," Alecto told him. "We are the Furies—supernatural beings," she explained irritably, seeing the look of noncomprehension on his face, "assigned to follow and torment Floyd Smathers until the end of his days. Read your Bulfinch, man!"

"We are avenging spirits," Megaera added with a horrid laugh. "Our duty is to drive Floyd to madness and self-destruction."

Tisiphone sighed. "Only way we can drive men mad." She glanced in the mirror mournfully. "I don't see why just because I'm a Fury I have to look a fright."

Her sisters glared at her. Then all three gnashed their teeth, causing the snakes on their heads to hiss and writhe, and chanted explanatorily: " 'From primal ages/This lot, our pride and glory/ Appointed was to us;/To Hades gloomy portal,/To chase the guilty mortal/But from Olympians, reigning/In lucid seats, abstaining,/Their nectared feasts we taste not/Their snow-white robes invest not/The maids of Erebus.' "

At that the steward knew this was a matter for the purser. And the purser, being quick of wit, saw immediately that it was a question for the captain to deal with.

The captain handled the situation admirably. "Since Mr. Smather's return passage is paid, we cannot eject him from the ship," he said, "and, since these ladies are bound by—er—divine law to follow him, we would be unable to eject them either. If they share the cabin with Mr. Smathers, no violence will be done to propriety, for they are considerably older than he is—by at least three thousand years, I should say.

"And we will not ask them for additional fares, for the Atlantean Line never charges supernatural beings passage, regarding the price of their fares in the light of an investment . . . Mr. Jennings," he addressed the chief steward, who had joined the curious group of ship's personnel, "you will accord these ladies every consideration."

"Why, thank you, sir," Tisiphone said. "It's so long since anyone afforded us any consideration," she added softly.

"This man," Alecto declared, "is

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trying to obstruct us in the performance of our duty. Carry on, girls."

"Lift ye the hymn of the Furies amain!" they chanted in chorus. " 'The gleeless song and the lyreless strain,/That bindeth the heart with a viewless chain,/With notes of distraction and maddening sorrow,/ Blighting the brain, and burning the marrow!' "

And the agonies that assailed Floyd were so piercing that, he felt, if only Alecto were to murmur, "Open a little wider please. Now, this isn't going to hurt you a bit," he might be back in good old Dr. Frankenstein's office.

II

"Oh, look!" exclaimed Miss Van Brunt, as Floyd entered the dining saloon that night followed by the Furies, "those three funny-looking Greeks are still with that Mr. Smathers."

The captain, at whose table she was sitting, blanched. "Please don't refer to those ladies as funny-looking Greeks, Miss Van Brunt. They are the Furies."

He seemed almost to tremble.

And Lord Threadgill, who, like all Englishmen, had undergone a classical education, was able to put it to some use at last. He explained to Miss Van Brunt who the Furies were. Having been to Bryn Mawr, Miss Van Brunt knew well enough, but she had also learned that knowledge is like lingerie—essential, but to be concealed. She was charmed.

"But surely they should sit at the captain's table then," she said.

"Mr. Smathers would have to, also," the captain warned her. "They are inseparable."

"Oh, by all means let's have him over too then," Miss Van Brunt declared. "A man who'd be pursued by the Furies must have more to him than I had supposed."

"Wonder what he did to deserve them," Lord Threadgill muttered jealously.

"That," Veronica replied with an artful glitter in her eye, "is what I propose to find out. You may be sure I shall waste no time."

So Floyd and the Furies were shifted from their little table for four in a quiet corner of the dining saloon to the glory of the captain's table. The Furies were ill-pleased at this, for they were unused to such a cordial atmosphere, being, like all monsters, shy at heart. But there was nothing any of the three could do—no hope of alleviation for their torment. Wherever Floyd went, they had to go as well . . . unless some cataclysm prevented them.

"Well, Mr. Smathers," Veronica said, as Floyd came up on deck the next morning to smoke an after-breakfast filtered cigarette, "I never expected to see you up in weather like this." There was quite a high sea, and Lord Threadgill had just left her, owing to a sudden indisposition.

"Yes," Floyd agreed, blushing at the memory of his weakness on the way out, "but I seem finally to have

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gotten my sea legs." And he took a deep breath of the bracing air.

"Where are your—er—companions?"

Floyd's face grew soft with sympathy. "Seasick—every last one of 'em," he said. "The sea *is* unusually rough for this part of the world this time of the year," he added knowledgeably. "They say Poseidon has a grudge against them. In fact, they say everybody hates them. I wouldn't be surprised if their whole vacation originated in paranoia," he went on, surprised to find himself talking so easily to Miss Van Brunt.

"Feeling themselves persecuted, they turned to persecuting others. Everbody talks about the Œdipus complex," he warmed to his subject, "but has anybody considered the far more dangerous Erinys complex?"

"No," said Veronica. "Tell me about it, Mr. Smathers."

Later on Floyd went below to his cabin. Alecto lay on the bed shrieking; Megaera screamed on the couch; Tisiphone ululated from the rug.

"I've brought you some fruit and a carafe of lemonade," Floyd said kindly. "Very good for seasickness."

"Go away," howled Alecto.

"You really ought to get out on deck, you know," he urged. "Fresh air's much the best thing for *mal de mer*."

"Go away," moaned Megaera.

"Would you like me to ask the stewardess to drop around and have a look at you?"

"Go away," groaned Tisiphone.

"Oh, very well," Floyd said, and he joined Veronica and the captain for lunch.

Since Poseidon continued to harbor his grudge, the Furies continued to keep to their—rather, Floyd's—cabin, and he slept in an adjoining one which happened to be vacant and which the steward gladly placed at his disposal, for a consideration.

However, Floyd didn't have much chance to sleep, because he was too busy keeping Veronica company in the absence of Lord Threadgill who was suffering from the same disability as the Furies throughout the voyage. But, try as she might, she couldn't find out what he had done to set the Erinyes on his trail.

By the time the Statue of Liberty hove into sight, Floyd and Veronica were affianced. Although Veronica had been married to various noblemen—and what, after all, made a British title so special?—she had never been married to a man pursued by the Furies and was curious to know what it was like. Floyd did not worry about taking on the responsibility of a wife despite the fact that he had no job, for he knew that Veronica had enough for two.

After being photographed together, the lovers had to separate at the pier, because the Furies insisted on getting into the same car as Floyd, and Veronica wanted to break the news gently to her father, who had come in the Van Brunt Cadillac to pick her up. The Furies also insisted on getting into all pic-

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tures to the astonishment and dismay of the photographers.

"Let them get in," Veronica said to her press agent out of the corner of her mouth. "I'll explain later. Big story."

She pretended to herself that she withheld the information in deference to Floyd's diffidence. But it was actually because she did not wish him to take the limelight away from her just then. She was generous, but not to a fault.

"Funny sort of fellow you picked for a husband, Ronnie," her father said, when they were alone in the back of the car. "Not, mind you," he added scrupulously, "that he looks any funnier than your seventh and fourth . . . But those were mighty queer-looking friends he had with him."

"Those weren't his friends; they were the Furies." Veronica explained.

Her father listened restlessly. "But you can't marry a man pursued by the Furies. Think how it'll look when you come down the aisle at St. James'."

"Oh, that's all right," she assured him. "Everybody will just think they're bridesmaids."

"But *why* are the Furies pursuing him?" he persisted. "Stands to reason he must have done something to rate them."

"Oh, probably something completely trivial," Veronica replied, for she didn't want to admit that she'd used all her wiles on Floyd and yet had failed to find out. "Floyd is, if anything, too high-principled. In fact, if he weren't pursued by the Furies, I'd say he was downright dull."

"The Furies don't pursue people for trivia," her father persisted. "Do you happen to know whether he killed his father and married his mother?"

"No," Veronica replied assuredly, "because he told me he'd never been married. And Floyd is notoriously truthful.

On the other side of town, Floyd managed to get the Furies out of the taxicab and into the lobby of his apartment house without incident. However, when the self-service elevator arrived, it already bore Mrs. Buchheister, of 4G, up from the basement with a load of wet laundry.

"Back from your travels, I see," she said, beaming at him. "My, you're looking well. And these are your aunts you've brought back from the old country. I can see the resemblance."

"'I breathe on thee curses,'" Megaera muttered under her breath, "'I cut through thy marrow/For the insult that pierces/My heart like an arrow.'"

"These are not my aunts," Floyd said coldly. "They are the Eumenides."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Eumenide." Mrs. Buchheister beamed impartially at each Fury. "As soon as you get settled, you must come down to my place for a glass of tea and a piece of strudel."

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Alecto glared at her. "Why . . . why . . . !"

"Why, we'd be delighted," Tisiphone said. "There's no harm in being polite," she explained, after Mrs. Buchheister had left them with effusive farewells. "Fair's fair—we're not pursuing *her.*"

"I'd almost sooner pursue anyone than this twerp!" Megaera snapped, as they got out on the fifth floor. "Criminals aren't what they used to be."

"Now, Megaera," Alecto declared reprovingly, as Floyd unlocked the door to 5G, "if you underestimate Floyd, you will lower our own prestige. His crime was the most horrible one known to God or man, and I'll thank you not to forget it."

"I won't," said Megaera, gazing drearily at the interior of Floyd's modest apartment. "I need something to raise my spirits. Who would have thought the Erinyes would ever come to this?"

The Furies screamed and howled all night, but on West Eighty-fifth Street pandemonium is commonplace, and Floyd was glad for this chance to get even with his neighbors.

"Ah, family life, there's nothing like it," said Mrs. Buchheister to Mr. Buchheister, as they sipped tea and listened dreamily to the yells from upstairs. "So nice for Mr. Smathers to have his aunts with him. I always felt so sorry for the poor boy, living alone like that . . . Such nice ladies, too. I must have them over some afternoon."

"Company, company, company!" Mr. Buchheister shouted. "Never a moment's peace! When the house isn't full of your half-witted friends, you're out gadding. Not a clean shirt to put on when I go to the office and still she gads!"

"Half-witted!" Mrs. Buchheister shrieked. "Look who's talking. The salary you get, your boss should be glad you don't come in naked, let alone with a clean shirt."

She hurled her glass of tea at her husband. The wet tea bag hit him smack in the eye, making him forget he was a gentleman. He riposted with a jar half full of strawberry jam. The battle was on . . .

Upstairs, one by one, the Furies ceased their activities to listen in reluctant admiration . . .

III

Floyd could not long retain his anonymity, for as soon as Veronica's press agent got the story from her he gave it to the newspapers, and Floyd and the Furies were interviewed innumerable times. They were also asked by the landlord to leave the apartment house.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Smathers, but the other tenants won't stand for no mythological Greeks. They say it gives the house a bad name. Everybody knows what them Greek gods was like."

So Floyd moved to Park Avenue, where Furies were welcomed. He was able to afford Park Avenue be-

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cause he had a fine new job on Madison. When Mr. Levjoy had heard of Floyd's changed status he had, with tears in his eyes, begged the young man to take back his old position at twice the salary.

But Floyd had refused. "It was the Acropolis Dried Fig Company to which I owe my success," he had said, "and it is the Hermetic Advertising Agency, which handles the Acropolis account, that shall have my services. My chief duty will be to write copy for Acropolis Dried Figs, because it will come—" and he bowed to several members of the press who happened to be standing nearby "—from the heart."

"And so he went to Hermetic—at ten times his previous salary. Mr. Mr. Solon, director of Hermetic, was overjoyed. "A man pursued by the Furies is just what every advertising agency wants and needs."

He turned to the Furies themselves. "And, if you ladies could be persuaded to extend your activities to the other members of the staff, I think I may assure you of a not insubstantial bonus when the glad Yuletide season rolls round."

"Bonus!" Alecto repeated in a terrible voice. "Are you under the impression, sir, that we are on your payroll?"

"How much do we get?" Tisiphone asked eagerly. "I'm dying to get some new clothes. I've worn these old rags for thousands of years."

"They are the classical garb of the Furies," Alecto retorted, "the purple-tinctured robes on which Athena herself has commented favorably. It would be sacrilege to change . . . But what's this about our being employed here?"

"It was a package deal," Floyd explained. "Come, girls . . ."

"Whole thing smacks of peonage to me," Megaera muttered. "Come to think of it, I could use a new chiton myself."

"There's going to be a problem space-wise," Mr. Solon mused. "Where are we going to squeeze in four desks?"

"Only one's necessary," Floyd assured him. "The Furies don't work at desks. They just stand behind me and shriek."

"Excellent!" Mr. Solon beamed. "Just the right atmosphere. Now, remember, kids—" and he put his arms around Floyd and the nearest Fury "—I'm expecting great things out of the four of you."

And so Floyd, as the man engaged to Veronica Van Brunt and pursued by the Furies, became a popular social figure. He was invited to all the really important social events and acquired a surprising amount of *savoir faire, amour propre,* and *je ne sais quoi,* though not enough to make up for a lifetime spent without them.

However, his love life was not altogether smooth for, spurred on by her curiosity, augmented by her father's, Veronica kept trying to ferret out the nature of the crime for which Floyd was being pursued by the Furies.

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"But I tell you, my sweet," he insisted, "it was a mere nothing."

"How dare you say that!" Megaera shrieked. "The Furies do not pursue men for a mere nothing!"

"Just between us girls," Veronica cajoled, turning to her, "tell me—what did he do?"

"The Furies are instruments of divine wrath," Megaera replied, "not squealers. Let him tell you himself."

"Tell me, darling, tell me," Veronica begged, embracing him. "I don't mind if you did kill your father and marry your mother, so long as you divorced, or otherwise disposed of her afterward. The studio frowns on bigamy."

Floyd squirmed away, embarrassed. "Nothing like that at all. And I do wish you wouldn't be so demonstrative in public, Ronnie."

At that the Furies laughed raucously, and Veronica opened her big blue eyes wide. Since she was an actress, she was used to being demonstrative in public. In fact, she was never at her best without an audience.

"But they're going to be with us all the time, sweetie, so you might as well get used to it."

"Golly," Floyd said, "I never thought of that. The three of them are going to watch us all the time. And you don't mind?"

"There's only two of them now," Veronica said evasively.

"So there you are!" he exclaimed, leaping to his feet. "Where's Alecto? Nothing's happened to her?"

"No, no, calm yourself—she's all right," Tisiphone soothed him. "We didn't say anything because we'd hoped you wouldn't notice."

"She thought she was entitled to one night off in five thousand years," Megaera said belligerently. "And I must say I agree with her."

"But where is she?"

Tisiphone blushed and patted the new stole, for which Alecto had accorded grudging permission and Floyd had paid. "Well, a man wheedled her into appearing on a television program called 'What's My Line,' I believe. He said she'd be a natural for it."

"It seems to me," Floyd said sulkily, "that I might have been consulted. After all, when a man is entitled to three Furies someone might at least inform him when he is being fobbed off with two."

"Look, chum," Megaera said, "get this through your thick head. We're your persecutors, not your employees."

"It's not as if I were a tyrant or anything," Floyd persisted stubbornly. "All I'm asking for is a little consideration."

That night it was so quiet he could hardly sleep, for Megaera and Tisiphone decided to knock off and play Scrabble until their sister came. Alecto didn't get in until late and then the other Furies were so busy listening to all she had to tell that they forgot to get in any shrieking and singing.

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Floyd lay on his bed feeling alone and neglected, listening to the merry voices from the next room as Alecto relayed the *bon mots* she had picked up at the studio. ". . . And then the tailor said to the professor, 'Euripides?' to which the professor replied 'Eumenides'." There were shrieks, but of laughter. Floyd hated to admit it, even to himself, but his Furies were slipping away from him . . .

The next morning at the agency Mr. Solon glared at Floyd and greeted Alecto wtih humorous reproach. "You slyboots, you," he said, wagging an arch finger. "Never telling me you were going on the air. You have certain commitments to Hermetic, you know."

"Floyd has, not us," Alecto reminded him.

"True, but, frankly speaking, his job is dependent upon you ladies."

"So fire him!" Megaera snapped. "See if we care."

"There seems to be an impression around that we are Floyd's maiden aunts," Alecto told him. "A wholly erroneous impression, I might add. We are his persecutors, and wish him only harm."

"Oh, you're just saying that!" Mr. Solon smiled. "You know you love Floyd like a son."

"Know what we do with our sons in Greece?" Megaera asked. "We bake 'em in pies and eat 'em."

Mr. Solon laughed. "What a sense of humor! You ought to be on TV yourself . . . And, speaking of that, I've got a little business proposition for you, girls. How would all three of you like to go on the air as a team?"

"Well, I don't know," Alecto said dubiously. "It would mean leaving Floyd alone."

"Only for a few hours. He's a big boy now. He can take care of himself."

"Ummm," Alecto pondered. "We do have a contract, you know, and with an Agency higher than Hermetic."

"Just wants to hog the limelight for herself," Megaera said jealously. " 'Mark my word, I tell thee truly,/Pride, that lifts itself unduly, Had a godless heart for sire./ Healthy-minded moderation/Wins the wealthy consummation,/ Every heart's desire.' "

"Now, Meg," Alecto replied, wounded, "you know I'm not that kind at all. I'm just thinking of our duty."

"Duty, shmooty," Tisiphone interposed, stars in her eyes. "I've always wanted to be an actress ever since I was turned down by the Bacchantes."

"And listen, girls," the tempter pressed his point, "this is real high-type stuff, fit for the gods. Acropolis Dried Figs plans to put on a series of classical dramas—something like the BBC's Third Programme."

"I have heard the Third Programme very well spoken of," Alecto conceded.

"They plan to open the series with Æschylus's *Eumenides!*" Mr.

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Solon cried, ecstatic at his own brilliance. "Imagine, Acropolis Dried Figs now present *The Furies,* by *Æschylus,* featuring the original Eumenides."

"Gee, the title part!" Megaera exclaimed. "Sounds good to me."

"All three of us leaving at once . . ." Alecto murmured. "If at least one of us were to stay with him. Tizzy, you're youngest!"

"Oh, no you don't!" Tisiphone exclaimed. "Look, Allie," she pleaded, "who'll know if all of us go out at once? We're so far away from Greece They couldn't get at us even if They did find out. Let's do it."

"All right," Alecto conceded. "Just this once."

Tisiphone clapped her hands.

"We're making some slight changes in the play," Mr. Solon added, "to make it conform to present-day tastes. It's going to be a musical."

"It always was a musical," Alecto informed him in a superior manner. "In the Greek drama, the choruses were all sung."

"Remember that catchy number that they hummed all over Athens in the fall of 458 B.C.?" Tisiphone mused "Do I!" Megaera repeated reminiscently. "Remember how we didn't have to shriek to drive men mad that year? All we had to do was sing it."

And the three sisters burst into song: "'For the Furies work readily / Vengeance unsparing, / Surely and steadily/Ruin preparing:/Dark crimes strictly noted,/Sure-memoried they store them;/And, judgment once voted,/Prayers vainly implore them./For they know no communion/With the bright-throned union/Of the gods of the day;/Where the living appear not,/Where the pale Shades near not,/In regions delightless,/All sunless and sightless,/They dwell far away.'"

Styles in music change over the centuries. Artist, copywriter, and account executive put down brush, pen, and whip respectively, and listened entranced. "With any luck—" Mr. Solon gleefully rubbed his hands "—we'll make a second Andrews Sisters out of you. Gee," he said wistfully, "if we could only get Frank Sinatra for Orestes. . . ."

IV

Floyd disapproved of the whole thing from start to finish. Mr. Solon had neglected to mention rehearsals when speaking of the few hours' leave that would be necessary, and the sisters, having made up their minds to appear, didn't quibble when they found out. Megaera even went so far as to call Floyd an old fuss-pot.

He wouldn't even watch the performance from the studio audience, and, instead, prepared to view *The Eumenides* from the Van Brunt game room, where he found himself alone with Veronica for the first time in months. But she was curiously restless and aloof.

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"What is it, dearest?" he asked, taking her hand.

"Don't, Floyd," she protested, pulling away from him. "I don't know what it is. Unless it's that I miss the girls."

"You only love me for my Furies," he said sulkily.

"Well," she said, "what other outstanding trait do you possess to make you worthy of me? Unless the horrible crime you committed gives you distinction. Now that we're alone, tell me—"

But just then the show came on. Floyd gasped when he saw what the clever make-up man had done to his quondam persecutors. The snakes on their heads had been bleached and curled into the latest coiffures, while the agelessness of immortality had been plucked and painted into the agelessness of the theatre. They were beautiful. Moreover, the brief tunics revealed hitherto unsuspected charms.

"'Ancient rights and hoary uses,'" they sang, "Now shall yield to young abuses,/Right and wrong together chime,/If the vote/Fail to note,/Mother-murder for a crime/Murder now, made nimble-handed/Wide shall range without curtail;/Sons against their parents banded/Deeds abhorred/With the sword/Now shall work, while ages rail.'"

The audience went wild with enthusiasm and, paying no attention to the pleas of the announcer, who kept reminding them that time is of the essence in television, clamored for an encore.

"They'll never come back to you, Floyd," Veronica said mournfully. "Never. They're a hit. And Greece is far away . . ."

"They've got to stay with me!" Floyd protested. "They can't leave me now. Why, they're my family. They're all I have."

Veronica shook her golden head wisely. "Look at their faces. They're having the time of their lives. You've lost them, Floyd."

"Oh, well," he said, trying to put his arm around her, "at least I still have you, Ronnie."

But she drew away. "Frankly, Floyd, don't you think we may be making a mistake?"

He stared at her.

"Without Furies," she went on, "you're not much of a catch for someone in my position, are you? Unless . . . Tell me—I insist upon it—what was the crime you committed?"

He swallowed. "All right—it was blasphemy."

"What!"

"All the other passengers were mean to me," he blurted, "and I was afraid to answer back, and I was seething with repressed emotions—which isn't good for the health, you know. So I climbed to the top of Mount Olympus and blasphemed the gods, because I needed an outlet and I thought I was pretty safe. Never imagined They would answer back. 'Pooh to Zeus,' I said. 'Two poohs to Hera, and a loud sneer to Hermes.' . . . I don't suppose I would've done it,"

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he confessed, "if I'd thought they could hear me."

"You call *that a* crime? Floyd, I am more than disappointed in you!"

"Blasphemy is too a crime."

"But not that kind of blasphemy. The Greek gods are mythological, so they don't count."

"But—"

"Floyd, I feel I have been the victim of a gross deception, and I must ask you . . ."

"Oh, take your old ring!" and he flung it at her. "Just you wait," he yelled over his shoulder. "The Furies will come back to me and you'll be sorry."

But he waited all night and they didn't come. They didn't even phone. Finally he sobbed himself to sleep.

In the morning the phone rang. He ran to it eagerly. But it was only Mr. Solon. "Smathers, do you know what those blasted Furies of yours have done? They signed up for a whole series with the Danai Gift Company."

"But I thought Danai were handled by Colossus," Floyd said innocently.

"They are! Smathers, you're fired!"

Well, Floyd thought sadly, putting down the telephone, there still was the unemployment insurance—only it wouldn't go nearly as far on Park Avenue.

Some time later, the buzzer at the door sounded and he crept miserably to answer it.

It was Tisiphone, wearing a smart charcoal-tweed suit with the new lowered waistline, a blue mink scarf, and a small grey hat perched upon her herpetic blonde curls. She looked ravishing.

"I came to pick up a few things we left," she murmured. "Thought I'd better ring the doorbell since—well—we're no longer attached to you. May I come in?"

Floyd stood aside so she could enter. "You did know, didn't you?" she asked anxiously.

He nodded. "Solon told me when he fired me."

"Oh, Floyd, I *am* sorry! But, after all, we couldn't let your career stand in the way of ours."

"How did you manage to get free from your—" he cast an involuntary glance upward "—other commitments."

She laughed. "Oh, it all turned out to have been a mistake in the first place. We had a lawyer look into it. It seems the entire Western Hemisphere was out of Zeus' jurisdiction all the time. And, anyhow, the whole thing was unconstitutional. We're going to stay in America and become citizens, so there's not much chance of Their getting at us."

But Floyd was more interested in his own future. "I trusted you," he said brokenly, "and you failed me."

"Please, Floyd, don't make it any harder."

"You deserted me. Now I'm . . . all alone."

"Oh, don't say that! You still have Veronica."

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He shook his head. "She ditched me, too. Seems she didn't love me for myself alone."

"Floyd, how awful!" Tisiphone's lovely eyes brimmed with tears.

"Oh," he said with heavy lightness, "I didn't really love her either, I guess. I was just dazzled by her beauty." He took a good look at Tisiphone. "And you're much more beautiful than she is, Tizzy. Much. I was blind not to notice it."

Her eyes shone. "O, Floyd, do you really think so?"

He nodded. "But I couldn't expect you to see anything in a perfectly ordinary guy like me. Ronnie was beautiful, but she was dumb. You have brains. You'd go for somebody handsome and intellectual."

"Oh, no, Floyd! For months I have been repressing the tender emotion for you that burgeoned in my breast."

"Repressions are unhealthful."

"I know—but who could love a Fury?"

"I could," Floyd said stoutly.

"Oh, Floyd!" They embraced.

Floyd did not worry about taking on the responsibility of a wife, despite the fact that he had no job. He knew that the salary the three singing Eumenides would make would be enough for four.

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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Some challenging new titles in the book field are engagingly appraised as guideposts to a thrillingly speculative tomorrow.

DECIDEDLY interesting is REPRIEVE FROM PARADISE by H. CHANDLER ELLIOTT (Gnome Press, $3). It is a novel of rebellion against a static and sterile society two thousand years from now, under the leadership of Jarel in ice-bound New Toangahela and, in a sense, Pahad tuan Konor, geophysicist and "fulfillment of a dynasty more enduring than any great family of the Atlanteans."

Pahad's world is a way of life and thought that is the regimented inheritor of days when the East meant "stinking cities where brutal European mercenaries were rather to keep the populace in than enemies out; endless mangy plains never meant for agriculture, struggling to support the load, raped of crops that made the next crop feebler." And the West, that had known a Roosevelt and an Eisenhower, but was now ruled by "the Favorite Son of California and Oregon, Sheriff of the Rio Grande, Admiral of the Pacific, The People's Choice"—that West was now "two hundred million voters existing between the mountains and the sea; ancient business centers housing the hereditary bureaucracy in patched-up luxury; suburbs spreading from

There's a fascinating range—and a fascinating variety—in this month's discussion of science fiction in hard covers by the ever alert Mr. Santesson. We think you'll agree that his critic's acumen is as surefooted as it is exciting.

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city to city—countless identical bungalows each in a half acre of muck garden stinking of imperfectly-treated-sewage-manure.

"And everywhere there were swarms of children in their skinny little backs and blue shorts, stupid-wise faces as alike as so many mice, tending the gardens or roving in listless gangs; parents working the six-hour day enforced by the Unions—straw wall-board, spun-glass textile, plastic utensils—plus four hours' Voluntary Service in the fields, yelling at mass prizefights or sweltering in reprint theatres. War with the Southwest set off delirious celebrations; casualties were high, more from lack of hygiene than enemy action, but it was a terrific change with a chance of loot or women."

The 40th Century world of the post-Polynesians is the inheritor of all this and much more. It is an agricultural world, with thought and action rigidly controlled. The League—the rebels—are the eager inquirers, the searchers who have rediscovered and re-developed Atomic Power, and who menace the static and sterile world of the post-Polynesian Heirarchy. "Here at last," as Pahad finds out, are "men and women who worked together, not by the compulsions of blind nature, nor the playground supervision of fumbling government, but by human intelligence." This *was* the-time "to claim the future that had been restored to man, to call all those who had endured like his father, mummy wheat awaiting the rains."

Elliott's interesting and important novel describes these men who sought to "rally the human remnant from the paradise of the swarm, the eternal, perfect, hideous today, into the boundless unknown of tomorrow." Recommended.

DR. ROBERT S. RICHARDSON, of the Mount Wilson and Palomar Observatories, presents the known facts—and some interesting speculations—in his EXPLORING MARS (McGraw-Hill, $4). He takes up the problem of how we will reach Mars, and speculates as to whether "the canals are constructed by intelligent beings" and whether we *will* find life, as we know it, and when and how interplanetary travel will be achieved.

Is there vegetation on Mars? Dr. Richardson suggests that "the fact that large, distinctly marked dark areas exist on Mars indicates that these surfaces cannot be dead; for no surface without the power to regenerate itself could withstand the continual inpouring of dust for ages. Hence the only reasonable explanation of the dark areas would seem to be that they consist of some living substance which stubbornly refuses to be obliterated by defying the sand drifts and feeding upon the dust itself."

Is there life on Venus? Dr. Richardson touches on this and other questions in what should be an important reference work for fan

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and professional alike. Recommended.

CEDRIC ALLINGHAM reports on his meeting with a Martian in Scotland, last year, in FLYING SAUCER FROM MARS (British Book Centre, New York—$2.75). Less persuasive than George Adamski and Desmond Leslie, whose earlier FLYING SAUCERS HAVE LANDED (1954, British Book Centre) he criticizes, Allingham, after discussing other visitors from Space, describes his conversation with and impression of the man from Mars who, as a sliding panel in the lower part of the Saucer moved back, leaped "lightly and gracefully to the ground," advanced to meet the writer, and stood there quietly while the two men remained for a long interval staring at each other, the Martian—except for his forehead, "higher than that of any man I know"—very much like the man he was facing.

The conversation between the two includes the flat assertion that Martian and Venusian saucers have landed on the Moon, and that the much-publicized canals are indeed artificial, "made up of a central strip of water, with vegetation to either side." Allingham sees Martian and Venusian observers as keeping the Earth under surveillance, apprehensively watching our progress at the dawn of the Atomic Age in which, while we have progressed scientifically, "socially we are as backward as we ever were. The recurrence of large-scale wars proves that."

He sees the Martians and Venusians as alarmed by the possibility that we, in our present state of cultural backwardness, may manage to establish ourselves on Mars or Venus, "bringing possible destruction with us for the whole civilization of our neighbor worlds."

Allingham concludes that the spacemen are "opening up for us a new golden age of happiness and prosperity—an age in which we would live in peace and security with our fellow men," in a burst of emotion in interesting contrast to his blunt dismissal as "too far-fetched to be taken at all seriously," of some of the main points in the Adamski-Leslie book such as "the stories of the flying machines ('vimanas') being mentally controlled by superhuman beings."

The sober Mr. Allingham has perhaps never heard, or held applicable to himself, that famous quotation about there being "more things in Heaven and Earth . . ." This is a pity, because it detracts from the value of an otherwise interesting account of another meeting with a visitor from the Stars. In time we—and perhaps Mr. Allingham—may learn that there is a very thin dividing line between the very far-fetched and the very real.

Desmond Leslie's one weakness is his reliance, in some instances, upon sources whose documentary value can be questioned, but this does not detract from the impor-

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tance of the Adamski-Leslie book and the basic soundness of some of the premises dismissed as "far-fetched" by the less metaphysically-minded Mr. Allingham. But by all means read the latter's FLYING SAUCER FROM MARS if you haven't already done so!

ANDREW NORTH introduces us to a future in which newly discovered planets are—in effect—put up for sale to the highest bidder, in his SARGASSO OF SPACE (Gnome Press, $2.50). Young Dane Thorson, newly appointed Apprentice Cargo Master on the trade ship "Solar Queen," helps to smash a gang of inter-galactic gangsters operating out of isolated Planet Limbo, scarred survivor of the wars that had destroyed the Forerunners. The "Solar Queen" owns ten year trading rights to a planet which "obviously" has no trade, but which does have secrets—secrets discovered by young Thorson and his shipmates. Recommended.

ANTHONY BOUCHER explores the fantastic and the future in FAR AND AWAY (Ballantine Books—35 cents), eleven Fantasy and Science Fiction stories dedicated to John W. Campbell, Jr., "for *Unknown* reasons." The anthology includes "The Anomaly of the Empty Man." "It was as if James Stambaugh had been attacked by some solvent which eats away only flesh and leaves all the inanimate article"; "They Bite"—"His blood and his strength and his life poured out before the little figure of sticks and clay"; "Elsewhen," the story of an almost successful murderer; "Sriberdegibit" and the excellent "Star Bride." Don't miss Anthony Boucher's FAR AND AWAY!

Time is running out in EARTHLIGHT by ARTHUR C. CLARKE (Ballantine Books, 35 cents). The discovery of heavy metals on the Moon leads to an inevitable conflict between Earth and her ex-colonies on the other planets. Developing for more than a generation, the crisis arose from the peculiar position of the planet Earth which had the essential metals—lead, uranium, platinum, thorium, tungsten and others—all needed by the independent republics on Mars, Venus and the larger satellites, now united in a Federation. This lack kept the Federation dependent on Earth "and prevented their expansion towards the frontiers of the solar system. Though they had searched among the asteroids and moons, among the rubble left over when the worlds were formed, they had found little but worthless rock and ice. They must go cap in hand to the mother planet for almost every gram of a dozen metals that were more precious than gold."

Accountant Bertram Sadler, drafted by Central Intelligence, finds himself on the Moon, "a minor pawn in a game of interplanetary chess," assigned to find the agent or agents responsible for

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the leak of vital information from the Moon to the Federation.

The Moon is a strange world, "home to some thousands of human beings. For all its harshness, they loved it and would not return to Earth, where life was easy and therefore offered little scope for enterprise or initiative. Indeed, the lunar colony, bound though it was to Earth by economic ties, had more in common with the planets of the Federation.

"On Mars, Venus, Mercury, and the satellites of Jupiter and Saturn, men were fighting a frontier war against Nature, very like that which had won the Moon. Mars was already completely conquered and it was the only world outside Earth where a man could walk in the open without the use of artificial aids. On Venus, victory was in sight, and a land surface three time as great as Earth's would be the prize. Elsewhere, only outposts existed: burning Mercury and the frozen outer worlds were a challenge for future centuries."

"So Earth considered. But the Federation could not wait"—and here, obviously, is the makings of conspiracy and violence and revolution. If you have not read Arthur C. Clarke's provocative and excellent EARTHLIGHT—get it today!

It had to happen, of course! Lait and Mortimer discovered Mars. Mickey Spillane discovered Science Fiction. Gold Medal *had* to discover Science Fiction and do so in EDWARD S. AARONS' hard-hitting and able ASSIGNMENT TO DISASTER (Gold Medal Books, 25 cents).

Soft spoken Maryland-born Calvin Padgett, electronics technician, whose psychiatric tests "recently disclosed anxiety neurosis, cause unknown," had disappeared. He is "Dangerous, armed, rebellious." And confused.

Sam Durrell has been assigned the urgent task of finding him before the enemy agents he is suspected to have contacted reach the man who had walked out of closely guarded Las Tiengas, passing hundreds of other men, eluding the radar screen, escaping the copter patrol and then vanishing. Padgett, possibly a traitor and also possibly just a very disturbed human being, carries in his head the details of Project Cyclops which—shades of the headlines the other day—will "orbit at one thousand miles up, circling the globe every ninety minutes." ASSIGNMENT TO DISASTER is the story of Durrell's hunt for Padgett and for the girl who was the target in the deadly race against final disaster. Good.

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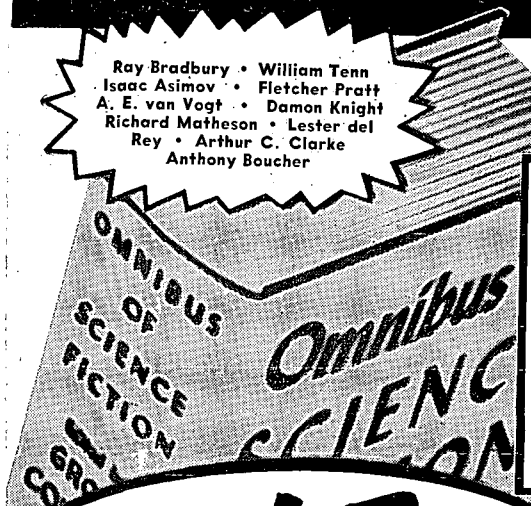

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